

# SEQUOYA REVIEW 2015

UTC'S LITERARY & ARTS MAGAZINE

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Emma Ensley, "Glitch"

# Foreword

## Diversity

di-ver-si-ty /də'vərsədē, dī'vərsədē/

:The quality or state of having many different forms, types, ideas, etc.

From the moment we leave high school and venture into the college world, we are immersed in diversity. The staff of the 2015 *Sequoia Review* brought with them a perfect balance of diversity that is shown through the words and artistic works of this year's issue. As the editor-in-chief, I am excited to reveal a creative and diverse journal of literary, scholarly, and artistic works to you, and to show off the talent of our writers.

Enjoy.

E.L.Cahoon  
Editor-in-Chief  
*Sequoia Review*



# Sequoia Review (A History)

It was a busy time in the United States in 1965: Martin Luther King Jr. marched 25,000 people to the capitol of Alabama; the US authorized its first ground combat forces in Vietnam; Malcom X was assassinated; The Who dropped their very first album; *The Sound of Music* was released in theaters; and the television soap opera *Days of Our Lives* premiered. It makes sense, then, that during this eclectic moment of history this magazine was born.

When faced with the turbulent world that was the United States in the sixties, many sought to express their feelings, protests, and critiques via art or the written word. It was a hard life then, before you could “tweet” your anxieties and receive instant gratification. At this point in time it was called *Echo Literary Magazine*, and it was published quarterly up until 1972—imagine, having to wait four months before seeing a printed version of your words. The audacity!

In 1975 this magazine was officially renamed *Sequoia Review*, which would serve as the permanent title for at least the next forty years. It is doubtful that the title will be changed in the future, for it both honors an important Cherokee contributor to the publishing realm, and because we have invested a fair amount of money in *Sequoia Review* buttons.

In all seriousness, this is a splendid publication. It has always been a fearless publisher of true and honest works from a variety of majors. It remains the hub of political, social, and cultural commentary that it was during its inception in 1965, while continuing to showcase the flourishing artistic abilities of this university. We are incredibly proud to say that the *Sequoia Review* is something that can be enjoyed no matter your field or background, which is something we are so incredibly proud to say.

So please, pull up a seat, and welcome us into your lives.

## CONTENTS

# Contents

Foreword	ii
Sequoia Review: A History	iii

## POETRY

51%	2
Grief	2
August, Years Later, Wondering	3
Hurricane Keith	5
Liquid Skin	6
My Idea of You	7
October 15, 1972	8
Just Off Blythe Ferry Road	9
Homeless, May 1982	10
A Feast for Hungry Hordes	11
Bacchanalia	12
Missing November Nights	13
Nutritional Value	14
spoons	15
Thoughts on Heroin	16
Wednesday Afternoon, March 11, 2009	17
White Zinfandel	18

## FICTION

Fish Tattoo	22
A Cop and a Priest Walk into a Bar	25
Where the Curb Ends	30
Two Hot Chocolates	34
Neurons Below	39
Yam Story	41
Brunch	43
Legacy	48
The Light of Trust	51
Ever After Only	53

## NON-FICTION

## CONTENTS

Dragon Breath	58
How Far Do Dead Fish Float?	59
I Don't See Me on TV	61
Undeclared Weight	62
Memories of a Friend	64
An Interview with <i>River Talk</i> author CB Anderson	66

### PAINTING

Submerged 1	71
Submerged 2	71
Chieftin	73
Made in America	73
The Deconstruction of Rochambeau	75
Edna Mae	77
Softness	79

### DRAWING

His Corner	83
Nonnie	85
Smyrna, Tennessee	87

### PHOTOGRAPHY

Abandoned	91
Disconnected	93
Forgotten	95
A Moment in Life Where Superheroes Exist	97
Almost	99
Crosstown Documentary	101

### GRAPHIC DESIGN

savior_machine	105
Flood	107
"There's something inside that may interest you. Won't you come in?"	109
"This house wants to be lived in."	111
Evolutionary	113

POETRY: BEGIN HERE

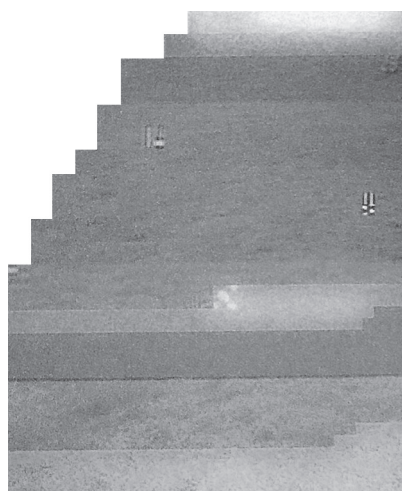
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POETRY

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sequoya review



## POETRY

### 51%

rachel smith

When the doors opened, the guests turned  
their backs on the altar to watch the bride  
arrive. I remained unmoved to watch the  
groom—

He was grimacing.

rachel smith

### Grief

rachel smith

By mistake, I brewed two cups.

# August, Years Later, Wondering

olivia townsend

I remembered why I hate the hot, hot August: it's the smell,  
 And I smelled it on a boy sitting in front of me who I did not know.  
 It's a smell, like grey polo shirts emblazoned with a private school crest,  
 Shirts that soak up the sweat and dirt from the epidermal layer of the skin,  
 Sweat that dries into the thick fabric and catches beads  
 Rolling downwards from the hairline in front of the ear,  
 Right onto the collar, underneath red mouths hanging open  
 And panting. I smelled it on a boy, and hated him too.  
 It smells like the leather on the seats in my grandmother's car,  
 The backseat in particular, a car whose scent and backseat together  
 Fold me in a fit of nausea (though I did love that car when it came to rescue  
 Me from the playground when school let out, from all the boys  
 In their grey polo shirts and sweat smell).  
 That smell reminds me of the misery that was served as the main course  
 Right before the palate cleanser of half-frozen Cheez-Its  
 Passed out by the lady called "Emma" (who smelled like my grandmother's car)  
 Shouting, "TAKE WHAT YOU TOUCH" when I was only digging  
 For the bag of Cool Ranch Doritos.  
 One bag of Cheez-Its uneaten is never enough,  
 Which is something you only understand in August after school,  
 With the smell of sweat and woodchips stuck in your nose  
 As you sit in a chair by the door well past the usual dinner hour,  
 The one hour that charged your mother for every fifteen minutes more.  
 That two-hour time on those hot August days  
 Between three and five before the fees ran up,  
 And I was still at school, and the phone kept ringing,

olivia townsend

## POETRY

And the Cheez-Itz were melting, smelled like hot dirt  
And woodchips, and paint peeling from old playground equipment,  
And the brown stuff on my hands from playing on the swings  
And the throbbing on the top of my foot when I jumped  
From up too high, that was still there after five  
When my mother had not come and the patients  
Had kept coming. That was all I had: patience.  
Patience and books. I had quit crying by that point,  
And maybe that was the problem. I had come to know that  
Leaving was always preceded with waiting and waiting  
Always paired nicely with reading. The pages smelled like school,  
The school library where Mrs. Rogers lived who is better than  
She sounds and who loved me because I loved her books.  
Surprisingly, reading does not smell like waiting,  
And I can no longer detect the notes of a ticking clock  
Or the essence of fifteen dollars or an old chair.  
It is only patience, precious patience,  
That still smells like August after school,  
Waiting to go home.



# Hurricane Keith

anna splean

Somewhere,  
I am still riding my bike  
across that swinging bridge.  
Somewhere,  
that dog I always give  
half of my sandwich to  
is tearing chunks out of my thigh.  
Somewhere,  
I run through  
what will become a hurricane in time,  
mouth open, eyes closed.

# Liquid Skin

alyssa homeier

Bottles of liquid skin  
 Line your counter top.  
 Foundation, concealer, and powder.  
 Sitting in their plastic cases,  
 Waiting to coat your naked face.  
 Shake it up, pour it out,  
 Smear it on, blend it in.

Hide your bags and shadows—

The evidence of insomnia.  
 Cover your scars and wrinkles—

The stress etched into your skin.  
 Disguise your sallow complexion—

The color stolen by wasted time.

You swirl your brush in blush,  
 The veil of rosy pink  
 Substitutes for smiling cheeks.  
 Shimmering shadows brighten your eyes.  
 Showcase this illusion of energy  
 By tracing black over your lid.  
 Pinch and curl your lashes,  
 Perking them up.  
 Comb and coat with mascara,  
 Weighing them down.  
 Swipe on gloss, smack your lips.  
 Smile.  
 Repeat.  
 Complete.  
 Now you step away from the mirror,  
 Away from the artificial lights.  
 A smooth face, devoid of  
 Blemishes and burdens  
 Stares blankly back at you.  
 Your masquerade is set.

# My Idea of You

davis wesson

I can see only gold.

Its color cloaks my nose with the smell  
of hickory.

It's the scent that implores unshakable safety  
if there was ever a day without you fireside.

You sit across from me wearing a movie  
star smile.

I sit across from you and examine the  
distance between us.

My mind converts those inches to miles  
without hesitation.

I shut out everything but you.

My spotlight illuminates you like a  
performer as they strum their paper thin  
ballad in Detroit.

Each chord reverberates, touching even the  
tautest brick in this whisky stained landscape.

Your voice gives warmth to the weary while  
snow drains across their lit cowboy killer.

My heart is being softened to your falsetto  
and every single particle of life is frozen in  
their disbelief.

Without transition I sit before you, nose  
to nose.

Your hair has faded to a shade I love more.

The oceans of your eyes have aged to a river  
I wouldn't trade for a moment in the depths  
of the Atlantic.

I search my mind for the perfect way to tell  
you, but I can't.

I crave your whisper in each moment of  
silence, but I love the silence for providing  
you its undivided attention.

"Time has been the gentlest thief for giving  
me the one who stole my heart."

You smile at an existence I've resolved.

I pull you close, and we close our eyes.

davis wesson

# October 15, 1972

david haynes

Dawn met Sunset at a dive bar  
called Ted's on October 15, 1972.

Three Miller High-Lifes into the evening,  
Dawn noticed Sunset in the corner

booth next to the Corona sign.  
The neon flash illuminated her face

every 5 seconds

for 5 seconds

until 5 seconds later

she was a complete mystery again.

Obsessed with questions of puzzle  
pieces and nudity,

Dawn rushed towards the booth.  
Sitting across from her,

he asked, "What do you smoke?"

"Anything," she replied.

Blood rushing downward, he pulled  
a mangled pack of Camels from his  
shirt-pocket.

This was his burnt offering.

The table, his altar.

Sunset loved how a bent, torn,  
crushed cigarette from a likely  
candidate for asshole of the year  
fit perfectly in the left corner of  
her mouth.

After too long of an uncomfortable  
silence, she whispered, "These nights  
keep getting longer."

"Come with me, baby," he pleaded, "I  
will give you light."

She smiled, "You forward fucker."

On the morning of October 16, 1972,  
she understood what he meant.

# Just Off Blythe Ferry Road

Hiawasee National Refuge

laurie perry vaghen

The farmhouse on the hill  
with slope of silver roof,  
hedge doorway in need of trim.  
Barely enough view  
to let our eye catch the gingerbread.  
It's the one from those mournful songs  
where a rope swing tires the oak.

So we imagine more from this home  
place of archetype, our own  
first recollection of sky, our childhood  
catapulted toward it with kicks  
and desire. These places we now call  
"few and far between." Thin places  
where I lift my lens past the sprawl  
as time waits like a passenger  
in the backseat of the car.

But then a honk moves my pause.  
Not winged crane but truck and sway  
of trailer hitch and hunter brown  
camouflage. A parade float of bamboo  
bundles, cut vine that fades invasive plans.  
He will slip into the water just ahead,  
where the road ends, memory—a ferry.

Even in this place marked with intention,  
the word refuge. A plea, a sign  
drawing all that migrates  
from the inner compass, even me.  
The man with the boat is in a hurry,  
as irony. He must drift far to take  
his fowl shot, to have the Sandhill cranes  
disperse like any frightened crowd.

I watch the water lap the crags of cut  
karst, the garbage caught on the chiseled  
crooks. "Who does this?" any child  
would ask. Ruin all around. And yet,  
here the frail cranes echo loud  
the shrill delight at sunlight, a feast  
of fish, their beaks as sieve of silt and sin.

In the distance a shot rings out  
and will again, but I am not a part of that,  
apart.  
I am here,  
where my calm heart must trust  
the beaten path that tells me how and when  
to gather itself up and lift.

laurie perry vaghen

# Homeless, May 1982

cody ray

*“He will not be anything until later, and then  
he will be what he makes of himself.”*

—Sartre

I'll have the short stack of chocolates, gnats'  
holes burrowed out the other side. Maybe a  
hole to drink through. A little girl doubled  
over her mama's shoulder, waving, but only  
because she's wearing her purple sunglasses.  
Dad's little movie star.

And they go out to lunch. And I watch the  
bugs. I can't believe I want them to come  
back, all pressed clean like they belong in a  
package. An acrylic shell, the sun flinching  
off the plastic—gunfire in slow motion.

A summer car window in black and white.  
Then you see the fingerprints. I took cleaner  
and rag to the glass while they slept, but it  
did nothing. I pressed until the rag squeaked,  
and I hid before they woke up. You see,  
there are only two sets. It can't be cleaned  
by me. The youngest actress hasn't started to  
climb above her knees to balance and ask for  
coffee and smile and say good job. When no  
one's looking she'll press her face against the  
shell and ask dad if the dirty man is okay.

# A Feast for Hungry Hordes

nicole parker

Information now  
that's what feeds the hungry hordes.  
Desperately sought oscillations disturb all the lonely quiet  
keeping difficult questions silent.

Information now  
that's what seeps from each of our mistakes.  
And seeking eyes and grasping hands clasp to milk  
sweet schadenfreude.

No one is silent now.  
We leak data  
(after all, quieter minds yield only slight mistakes).  
And where hunger reigns, all currents move towards overproduction.

A thousand years remakes the human form:  
Now with bowed back, tiny *T. rex* arms continuously interface,  
all difficult questions lost to noise.

nicole parker

# Bacchanalia

halley corapi

Up the rings of smoke go, six ghostly spheres,  
from mouth through air to encircle the cinders  
sparking, fleeing from the first bonfire of the season.

One hour before the storm, at Morgan's Steep,  
young men play a game of hide and seek  
while girls go waltzing with the trees.

Footsteps crunch loudly through the still dusk,  
snapping twigs and dying flowers.  
Someone is laughing at the edge, mocking the  
distance down.

A girl stands alone on the low stone wall,  
and extends her arms straight out from her sides  
pushing the oncoming night away, palms pressed  
against the dark, keeping the stars at a safe distance.

In my dreams this is the place,  
where my body turns into something else.

The others do what I want, and they dance.  
They chant nonsense at the faint moon,  
and they speak the night's language and coax  
it into their wild open arms.

The girl stays still, mouth turned slightly downward  
and bows her head.

She doesn't smell the rain but it's coming.  
I remember, and I wonder  
If she was me after all, or a shade of me

Only visible in the gray clouds that still stretch across  
the valley this time of year, though I don't build fires  
anymore now that I know they'll be choked by the rain.



# Missing November Nights

caleb moore

My good shoes squished on soggy  
clumps of old grass,  
while the moonlight tried to show me  
how muddy I'd become.

Leftover wood was crackling on the  
bonfire, charring black to meet the needs  
of another cold November night.

If only I had savored it.

I stepped up to the pyre.  
The moon's reflected light evaporated,  
melted by the light from the flames.  
The fire quivered and stretched,  
letting its arms reveal us as half-lit faces.

If only I had studied those faces.

The wind suddenly blew sparks,  
dusting the darkness with the firefly's  
envy, and ending their stay a moment later.

If only I had known we were sparks too.

Maybe I would have taken a deeper  
breath, before we leapt from the flames  
of our final starry night.

I could have blown the embers back to  
life, ten, twenty, a hundred times,  
instead of flooding our last furnace.

But now the friends are gone,  
and with them,  
those cold nights in the field.

But I remember those half-lit faces,  
because their memory is all that  
didn't blow away.  
Like the smoke, like the ash.  
Like the sparks.

# Nutritional Value

holden bitner

How can space be full of nothing?  
 Being space, it is full of emptiness.  
 Not nothing, emptiness.  
 Is it a way to describe the lack?  
 That lack of something there,  
 or does that lack implicitly exist like  
 the feeling of emptiness?

Is space like the stomach of  
 God or a giant monster full of some  
 things, but mostly nothing, er, emptiness?  
 This certainly doesn't describe my belly,  
 but does describe the empty barrel  
 can of Miller High Life that I left  
 in the chain-link fence as I walked  
 back from the bar.

I want to throw up.  
 I want to throw up stars like the ones  
 glued on my ceiling when I was a kid,  
 or like the ones with fluffy rainbows  
 that come out of unicorns' asses in  
 coloring books. I want to throw up  
 butterflies too, but now that I think  
 about it I remember that the ancient  
 Toltec people revered butterflies  
 as totems of great prowess in combat,  
 as the little flying flowers often clustered  
 on bodies after battles, or formed iridescent  
 shrouds for sacrificial victims.

Apparently, butterflies appreciate the  
 nutritional value and sugar in human blood.  
 Who could know?  
 Maybe God appreciates the nutritional value  
 of stars. I would suspect that He (or She) is  
 some sort of organism reliant on hydrogen,  
 but maybe I'm wrong about that, and God  
 just suffers from terrible indigestion.

## spoons

madison baldwin

His eyes  
spent more time  
rolled back  
into his head  
than they did  
watching his  
little girl grow up

While he searched for answers  
at the bottom of a syringe  
or a dime sack full of white powder  
or in the corners of a glass bottle

She became someone else's  
little girl  
and he became  
a broken man  
with arms full of scars  
with no lithium  
left in his brain  
and no spoons  
without holes  
burnt into them.

madison baldwin

# Thoughts on Heroin

joshua morales

I thought it was rude, when  
crying, taking your lighters  
they emptied your pockets,  
trying to take mine too.

I watched that body of yours,  
unpredictably gray, dripping away  
like the smoke from my cigarette,  
being thoughtlessly carried away.

I thought it was strange, when  
sweating, breathing your last  
they asked for your name,  
wanting to steal mine too.

I watched that life of yours,  
unrealistically calm, swirling away  
like the breath from my lungs  
and the drug in your veins,  
without even knowing your name.

joshua morales

**Wednesday  
Afternoon,  
March 11, 2009**

zach nicholson

When  
mom left,  
gas station  
vending machine  
took my last dollar and fucking kept it.

zach nicholson

# White Zinfandel

courtney spaulding

Sweet fire sings my throat,  
a grimace, then a grin.  
I'll know you better tomorrow.

Fermented Dementia.

I remember you, not when I needed to.  
The things I told you,  
the pieces you picked up.  
UP.  
And flush.

Rose-colored vision,  
but now I see you perfectly.  
And I know we're not friends.  
Turn off the lights, and I'll forget you.  
Until I remember you again.

courtney spaulding

POETRY: END HERE

POETRY: END HERE



FICTION: BEGIN HERE

FI

TI



FICTION

# C ON

sequoya review

# Fish Tattoo

margaret green

"I want something gooey and sinful, whatever you're not having," I said to my boyfriend as I plopped into the booth at the café around the corner from my apartment. Though the place was a two-minute walk, I'd never been before. Liam brought his kid here in the afternoons some days, but I was never invited. Relationships seem to perk up when the end is inevitable, but I didn't know that at the time. Suddenly at the end, both partners have the energy for something new.

"Whatever you want," Liam said.

"We're going Dutch."

"I didn't bring my wallet."

"Of course you didn't," he said.

The restaurant was trendy for the neighborhood, the kind of brunch and weekend place that kept odd hours and changed the menu daily. The wait staff parked their scooters on the sidewalk next to the outdoor tables. No one in my hometown even owned a scooter; bicycles were always lying in yards. The chickens liked to roost in the wheels.

After we ordered, he pulled out his wallet and pretended to count his cash, his finger flipping through the bills. He pulled out a twenty and laid it in the middle of the table. He smiled, and I assumed half of the twenty was for me. A shared dry sense of humor formed our initial connection. We'd met commenting on a friend's picture on Facebook, and we continued to talk online until he asked me to a party for his old fraternity brothers. I can't remember what the picture was, but Liam seemed refreshing somehow, even though he was ten years older and had a five-year-old son. At twenty-one, about to graduate, and never having a

relationship longer than a month, talking to any adult male felt refreshing. I liked the adorable way his hair was beginning to slide off the back of his head.

"Put your foot up on the seat," he said.

Liam retied my already perfectly tied shoelaces. "The first time you tied my shoe, it was sweet." He knew I hated him doing simple things that made me feel little.

In the afternoons I manage a classroom full of untied shoelaces and tricky Velcro at an afterschool program for first graders. None of my professors told me I'd tie laces more than teach language arts and addition, but I guess that's what teaching is—trying not to give up one thing for the sake of another, a sort of juggle.

"I want you to revise your resume this afternoon," he said, "so I can get it to Peg in H.R. Monday morning. As soon as you graduate, the admin job is yours—you'd make three times any school teacher pay, and we can go to conferences together."

"Wonderful—conferences." I pushed the Tabasco sauce over to him, and then added sugar to my water, something I'd started a couple weeks before. I stirred. "That's just not for me, honey."

For a few minutes we sat in silence. He checked his phone, and I stared out the window at a decorative windsock across the street. At first the shape was indiscernible, hanging limply from its stick. Then the slightest breeze filled it into a fish shape with big red lips forever open and grasping for the stick. Finally, my pancakes arrived. "I'm only thinking about what's best for you, Tabby."

"I don't know if I can eat something super sweet after all."

Our table pressed against the large front window overlooking the city street a few feet below. A drop of red blood rolled down the

window pane, and it scared me for a second. Then I realized there wasn't any blood at all. The window had a crack in it that I hadn't noticed when we sat down. A red delivery truck drove past, and the edge of the glass caught the color.

It was too much to hope for—a family of my own, no longer a kid caring for other people's kids, trying to prove myself. Liam always insisted on a condom—he wasn't aroused without one, but he usually relaxed his rule for round two, on the few occasions we got that far. Two months ago I'd gotten him that far. He'd had a hard divorce. Other than logistics, we never talked much about his child from the first marriage, high school sweethearts. He wanted his life with me kept separate from that. Our relationship was far down on the pecking order of kid, job, ex-wife, drunk/stoned golf every other Friday night—I felt proud he'd squeezed me in at all on some days. Liam lived by himself because he had to keep everything in order, so he'd get to see his son on the days marked on his big calendar. He brought the calendar over to my place one night so I could copy down the days.

"I can see why you and Jake love this place so much," I said. "Don't you think it's about time I meet him?"

"It's not gonna happen anytime soon, Tabby. His mother's a prick, you know this."

Everything he ever said about his kid, his mother, and child support sounded off, but what did I know? I wanted a quiet love, something that happened so naturally it was effortless. Having to fight my way into Liam's life felt like forcing water and oil together. Those sayings about how love's worth fighting for, or some such, felt wrong. I'd had my share of passionate but short-lived romances, and something peaceful felt right, but I'd mistaken peaceful for loving when in actuality Liam was just spent. With an intensity that scared me, Liam

looked me in the eyes and asked, "What would you do if you had one more day to spend with the person you loved?"

My mouth was full of pancake, which I swallowed in one golf-ball sized gulp. What did he mean? Death or a bucket list? Was he talking about me? Was I getting dumped? I should be dumping him. But when someone's about to dump you, don't you want to push yourself against the wall and let someone else finish?

Too afraid to ask him what he meant, I gave him my sweetest answer, "I'd take a tattoo gun and cover them with hearts. No, I'd cover them with shields to protect them when I was gone. Scales like a fish and armor like a dragon to keep them safe." I guess I wanted protection, some thin covering over my sensitive skin.

"You don't have a tattoo, do you, honey?" he asked. "I want you to have one. I bet your kids would get a real kick out of it." He quietly finished his spinach and eggs.

An hour later, a heavily tattooed guy with a face like Lance Armstrong moved away from the counter in the tattoo shop to give Liam time to look around. Liam's tie hung out away from his body almost touching the floor as he looked at the lowest row of samples. The stripes on his tie were black and white diagonals. The kind of high-contrast pattern that seems to move if your eyes are a little out-of-focus and you stare at it too long. I hated that tie.

"I've wanted a tattoo for years, and never thought I'd ever take the plunge. I know exactly what I want," the nervous energy made me a little giggly. The tattoo artist looked at me like I wouldn't go through with it, but he didn't understand the plunge I was making.

"You know what we could do?" I asked Liam.

"We're getting tattoos like a Harley rider or a

neo-Nazi,” Liam said, under his breath.

“What else is there, a trip to an abortion clinic?”

Sometimes I ignored his humor when it went too far, even though I understood it. The sarcasm and the shock value pushed the world away, enough to protect oneself from the hurt. From a horrible divorce or from the fear of raising a baby alone, from everything. There was no way he could tell I was pregnant. He wasn’t that observant.

“We could get rings tattooed on our fingers,” I said, “a forever symbol of us.” He missed the tiniest note of sarcasm, and my last genuine attempt at getting him to open up.

“And we could get Bible verses tattooed on our foreheads.”

“What’s wrong with you?” In that moment with the way he turned his head and walked back toward the door, I’d never felt so alone. I imagined the fish in the hundreds of tiny pictures on the wall start to swim and blink their eyes at me. Then as they all began to wake and move and grow alive, they changed places with each other, diving in

and out of the white wall and the paper they were on. The flowers, waves, and other shapes around them twirling and receding. They changed places on the wall as they flipped and popped their mouths open and shut. They were breathing, and I started to breathe again as well.

The tattooist asked, “So what are we doing?”

“A small fish right here,” and I pointed to my stomach.

I dreamed a few nights earlier about a fish floating in a goldfish bowl, even though he wasn’t a goldfish. He was tiny with really huge scales and very little fins. In the dream he tried to tell me something, but his only sound was the pop from his mouth opening and closing.

I never told Liam about the dream.

Ten years later I saw him while my son Finn and I walked home from school. Liam didn’t notice either of us even though he made eye contact with me for seconds that lasted forever. I told Finn his father was a fish. He loves that story.

# A Cop and a Priest Walk into a Bar

paige broussard

So this cop walks into a bar.

It's a real shitty bar. Dimly lit. Smoking is permitted. There's a small bar top with a few stools. All of them wobble. An old TV above the bar plays a hazy picture. There are maybe ten small tables. Some have chairs. Half as many booths with faded maroon seat fabric, all torn and exposing the yellow and white stuffing, now accumulating grayish grime. Two pool tables, but only one full set of balls. One jukebox, unplugged: last updated in 1978.

So this cop sits down at the bar. There are about four others already seated. And everyone gets all uncomfortable because he's still in uniform. So they start shifting around and avoiding eye contact, and of course he notices so he tries to ease the tension.

"Long day...I could really use a stiff one before I go home." And everyone realizes the dramatic irony of the situation because a lot of closeted gay men like to frequent this bar since it's off the beaten path in this mid-sized, conservative city. Two of them stifle laughter; the remaining two just let it out. The cop is pleased with himself because he senses the tension has been eased by his remark.

The cop did have a long day though. He issued four speeding tickets and three of the offenders really hassled him. He issued one non-moving citation for a seat belt violation to a 17-year-old girl who called him a "basic pig bitch," and he's not even sure what that means.

He's a young cop, less than five years on the job. Long enough to understand the power that comes with the gig, but not

long enough to have been corrupted by that power. At the end of the day, he's just a regular dude, doing the best that he can, but the monotony of his work is slowly killing him on the inside. He just needs someone to serve him a drink and 20 fucking minutes to himself, for Christ's sake. Is that so much to ask?

The bartender asks the cop what he'd like to drink. The cop's eyes move over the bottles behind the bar. He sees a sign that reads "Genie's Bar" and the cop says, "What, do you grant wishes or something?" And the bartender vaguely laughs, but he really doesn't find it amusing because all first-timers ask that question. The cop orders a whiskey on the rocks because real men drink whiskey straight, but he doesn't really have the taste or stomach sophisticated enough for the task so he's settling for a more palatable option. The bartender serves him and says, "Gene. My name is Gene. I inherited this bar from my father with the same name. My mother's pet name for him. I haven't had the nerve to take it down."

So an hour or so later this priest walks into the bar. Because why not? He's completed his sermon much earlier than anticipated, no services are scheduled for this evening, the old ladies who teach Sunday school are giving him a headache, and he's been praying for at least four hours today. He just deserves a break. What is he, a Baptist? Is he really asking for too much here?

This priest also happens to be painfully aware of the power that his career affords him, but he's not yet corrupted by it either. He's also a sexy priest. He has a beard because, even though he's pledged a life of celibacy and service to the Lord, he isn't living under a rock, and he totally knows that beards are "in." It's short and well kept. His hair has grown just past his ears: smooth and auburn. Crows feet and sunspots have made their marks around his emerald eyes,

but they just make him look hotter. He works out too, especially his arms. When he's in his full fancy priest regalia, you can still tell that he's fit. His clerical collar shows off his toned neck and world-class jawline.

He comes here on occasion because it's within walking distance of his living quarters. The bartender recognizes him and prepares his regular drink. Red wine. Of course it's shitty table wine and it's been open too long so it's become a little bitter, but the priest doesn't mind. He usually gets at least one drink on the house when he comes in here. Besides, if you aren't going to turn it into the blood of Christ, it doesn't need to be Bordeaux's finest vintage.

So the priest sits down next to the cop because hey, he doesn't judge. He isn't intimidated by a uniform. They don't say much for a while because they've both had such long days and all they want is a little quiet time to themselves and just a little drink to take the edge off. I mean, they aren't asking for too much are they? They are defenders of bodies and souls, after all.

But slowly, as time passes and the joint starts to fill up, they warm up to the idea of conversation. When they get pretty drunk they start to really open up about themselves, which is perfect because the cop has a lot of baggage and the priest is accustomed to listening to other people's problems. The cop is just getting out of a short-lived relationship, but they have all been really short-lived. She was nice, but he always felt like he was faking it with her, like he never quite knew if he was falling in love or to even know what love was supposed to feel like when it started happening to him. His mother died tragically (and comically) due to severe head injuries after a remote control flying lawnmower struck her and several other spectators at a football halftime show. His father never recovered from the loss, dated a few women, and certainly never

remarried. He became silent, hostile, and easily annoyed. They rarely visited family and the cop didn't like to have friends over very often. The cop visits his father occasionally, but they don't have the bond that he wishes they did.

A couple of hours later, these two women walk into the bar: a blonde and a brunette. Good-looking girls. Well kept. They don't look like centerfolds or anything, because well...because the images of women in media have been painstakingly edited before publication to the point of unreality. To even receive this honor of having your image photoshopped, you must first go through a years-long process of extreme dieting and self-loathing that begins essentially at birth, fueled by the exposure to images of other non-real women. But, I digress. These women are good-looking women, even for your average, run-of-the-mill women. They're the best looking women in the bar, easily.

They've come to play a game of pool. They're good at it, too. They know that only one set of balls is available in this bar, so they collect them. The brunette racks while the blonde goes to the bar and orders two cocktails. Both vodka, top shelf. One with tonic water and lime. The other: cranberry juice.

This group of men (two men of Latin American descent, two black guys, and a handful of crackers) at a table sees them and walks over to make conversation. One of the white guys is like, "Hey ladies, we were all just sitting over here and we couldn't help but notice that you two are attractive women who are also playing pool, and to be quite honest, we would simply like to get your attention. We know that you'll kind of just shrug us off and that none of us really have a chance with you, but even negative attention is better than no attention at all. I read that in a book about dog training." And the women are amused because the

honesty and humility is actually quite refreshing, and they're relieved that there's no pressure about the situation because one of them has a headache and the other has a bad case of being a total bitch. So they share some of their cigarettes along with the billiard table and their balls, which is the only full set in the house.

Over at the bar, the priest excuses himself from his conversation with the cop so he can visit the men's room. On his way back to the bar, he and one of the black guys from the group make eye contact. The black guy is easily the hottest human in the bar, even hotter than the priest. The two beeline toward each other and strike up a conversation.

The group of men and women are all getting along quite nicely and they exchange some amusing anecdotes. They have even decided to take turns buying rounds of drinks, loser buys. But they don't follow that rule too harshly because the women are really dominating the pool table and they don't want to be unkind.

One of the white guys returns from the bar with his hands full of libations. He tries to scoot past the blonde, who is having a good laugh about a joke about this seal who walks into a club. She turns around, cue in hand, ready to set up for her next shot, and the two collide. Dark beer and rum and soda run down the front of her shirt. This startles her because the drinks are cold. She lets out a squeal.

Now the cop hears this, and he assumes the worst, because he sees the worst all the time. He leaves the bar and walks over to the group, looking confident. He promptly asks what the heck is going on over here. Everyone is pretty drunk at this point so they all go about explaining different versions of the same story at once, which is meant to ease the cop's worries but does the exact opposite.

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Now, the priest and the black guy have really hit it off at this point. The black guy has told him about his childhood in church and his young adult life that led him away from it, his metaphysical beliefs, and his doubt in a higher power because of inconclusive logical evidence. He thinks religion is good in the proper hands, but he has serious doubts about contemporary organized religion and the way we (we meaning Christians in America) handle the mingling of political life and religious belief, or the guise of religious belief.

The priest is half listening. Mostly because he's heard this before and he does not think this is the time or place to convert a lost soul. Why don't I get a fucking rest day like everyone else? Ain't I a man?

The priest has managed to change the course of conversation. He asks the black man if he works out because "I can tell." The black man responds that yes he works out and that he also has a strict diet because abs are made in the kitchen. They share a soft chuckle and the priest asks the black man if he can feel his arms because, "That muscle shirt looks really good on you. You wore that on purpose, didn't you? You're really asking for it." He also feels his chest, but without permission. The black man asks if he can feel the priest's "guns" as well. He's impressed and asks the priest how much he can bench press.

The priest does not intend to take this interaction much further. He's taken a vow of celibacy, and obedience, and he intends to keep them. He's pledged his services to his parish, the bishop, and the global Catholic community. He's simply enjoying a little temporary physical affection, a basic need shared by even the most devout among us. The black man feels no romantic

attraction to men. He's just a little drunk, and he thinks this opportunity to fulfill some ephemeral physical need for the priest feels exotic and dangerous.

The cop sees the black man run his fingers through the priest's beard, admiring it. He feels betrayed. Not in the sense that he felt a romantic connection with the priest, but more in the sense that he felt like they were really hitting it off. I mean, he didn't think I was going to take him home or anything. The cop didn't feel attracted to the priest, but he does realize that the black man is getting some really intimate attention that he'll never share with the priest. He becomes jealous. Then he feels confused because he has no idea where the jealousy is coming from. He becomes enraged because he cannot understand his own feelings.

The cop is brought back to the immediate scuffle with the group of men. One of the Latino men comes forward and says quite clearly, "He didn't mean it, man!"

The cop grabs the nearest beer bottle and smashes it on the side of the pool table.

"Yeah, and I don't mean this!"

And really, he doesn't. His training and experience have primed him for this knee-jerk reaction to his surroundings, which is compounded by the alcohol. His understanding of the world is so deeply rooted in his subconscious that he doesn't even know what's motivating his actions.

He grabs the Latino man by the arm and puts him into a reverse armbar.

They all stand still for a moment, making eye contact with each other, one by one. The cop doesn't know how to back out of this situation. He was sick on training day when they covered the chapter entitled

"Oops, I started a bar fight" from the police training manual. He begins to panic.

He doesn't know how all of this escalated so quickly. He can't relate to these men. He isn't like them at all. He tries to remember a single meaningful relationship he's shared with another person and he can't. He is a broken man. He considers adopting a pet.

"What's with the long pause?" asks one of the guys.

And immediately the tension breaks and the other guys start cracking up because this is an inside joke among the group: an allusion to one of their favorite classic jokes. This bear walks into a bar and the bartender asks him what he'd like. After great hesitation, the bear orders a drink. The bartender says "What's with the long pause?" and the bear says, "Always had 'em!"

The cop freaks out a little and he asks, "What the shit is so fucking funny? You think this is a joke?" But really, he does feel a little better because laughter naturally relieves tension. So the other guys tell him the joke and he agrees, yeah that's a good one. During this lighthearted chatter, he finds a way to ease his grip on the Latino's arm, pats him gently on the back and apologizes. Only the brunette notices.

The priest walks over to the cop, smiles, grabs him with both arms and says, "Go and gin no more!" They both have a good laugh.

The cop walks away from the group so he can pay his tab and leave as quickly as possible. The brunette follows him. They went to high school together, but she barely recognized him until she saw that raw, teenage aggression bubbling back up to the surface. She doesn't tell him this part, of course. The cop can't remember her name, but he recognizes her face. The brunette knows that Gene keeps a dusty tin of band-aids, gauze, and antibiotic ointment behind the bar, just in case some idiot gets too drunk and decides to smash a beer bottle. She sets about mending some minor



wounds on the palm of his hand and they share some small talk. He has no chance with her, but that's okay. He's happy to see a familiar face.

The priest invites the black man to come to a service at his church sometime. The black man asks for directions and politely listens, asking him for clarification when he does not follow the names of the streets. The priest does not expect him to come; the black man will never show up.

There's a homeless man who sleeps outside on occasion. Gene walks over to the door and steps out into the street. He sees the man and motions him over. When Gene doesn't feel like cleaning up a mess, he invites the guy in to do some light work and pays him five bucks and a drink, always the same: four fingers of bourbon.

The homeless guy comes in and Gene retrieves the broom from behind the bar. Before handing it over, Gene uses the handle of the broom to tap the television three times. The quality of the picture improves. The patrons sitting at the bar perk up slightly. The late night news is playing, no sound.

Gene walks over to the jukebox and plugs it in. Sometimes it works and sometimes he buys a song or two on the house. The box clicks a few times and with a slow, distorted start, Paul Simon's "American Tune" sails through the bar.

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The cop goes home and furiously masturbates to the lingerie section of a JCPenney catalogue.

# Where the Curb Ends

barret tomb

I groaned as the world swirled around me, courtesy of a hangover of epic proportions. I knew the feeling well given this was the fourth time this week I've woken up with one. Another blast of nausea kept my eyes closed, and when it settled I was still reluctant to open them. Thankfully, this time the world remained steady and after a blink I recognized where I was. It was a Chinese restaurant just down the street from my apartment. Even if I had kept my eyes closed the greasy smell that made everything oily in here was recognizable enough. Red streamers were duct taped to the sides of walls, huge portraits of oriental art hanging just under them. I was in my usual spot shoved against the wide window to the street with one of those portraits in front of me—a picture of some fat man in flowing red robes glaring down at me like my principal in middle school would.

I looked down at the table in front of me to find an empty plate and bowl. Brown sauce caked the bottom of the plate like roadways, and I could see a few stray specks of red in the bowl, my usual meal. Had I already eaten it and passed out? It wouldn't exactly be the first time that happened here. A quick glance to my left confirmed my thoughts—they always left the fortune cookie and check next to my head when I passed out. They were used to it.

A stray smirk slipped out as I reached over for the fortune cookie and check. It was the usual amount, and this time I had the luxury of cash on me. I set that down by the edge of the table, but stopped. I looked up at the cashier, a young Asian woman with bright eyes and an even brighter personality. I might as well leave quick and pay up front

before I pass out again. Or worse. I set the check down again, this time fiddling with the plastic around the fortune cookie. Per my usual ritual I simply broke the cardboard—tasting cookie in half to get to the treat inside. I had a good feeling about the future but I wouldn't mind a cookie telling me so.

I read the paper, then stopped. I read it again and another, a little gasp found its way out of my throat. Apparently they were using joke fortunes now or this was a pretty bad marketing trick. There in bright blue letters my fortune read: 'You know what you did.' What kind of fortune was that? I'm fairly certain I knew if I did something, even then it wasn't worth being shoved into a cookie. It wasn't even funny, it was really just creepy.

"What garbage," I said to the offending paper. I ripped the flimsy slip in half and watched it fall to the plate to soak up the brown sauce. *You know what you did*; I know I got a bad fortune cookie that's for sure. Standing up from the booth I took my check up with me to meet the cashier.

As always she smiled and asked, "Enjoy the meal?" Unlike her parents she spoke perfect English, something I could appreciate.

"Guess I did," I answered and put the check in her hand.

"And I guess you had a good night too," she said with an airy laugh, her fingers tapping against the register. "You were trying to breath into your soup earlier."

"Yeah. Sorry about that," I said, rubbing at my forehead when the pain of remembering last night sprung up.

Again came that airy laugh as she dumped the change into my free hand. Those bright eyes looked up at me and with a smile she said, "Sort of like how sorry you were to get in your car last night?"

It took a full second for her words to sink in.

“What did you say?” I asked.

“Come see us again soon, sir,” she said sweetly. Turning around, she departed through the curtain behind the counter. I couldn’t hope to form a word to stop her.

I must have misheard. This headache was getting worse. Shoving the change into my pocket, I turned around and pushed open the door of the restaurant into the morning air. Tall buildings in front of me cast a shadow over the sidewalk, blocking out most of the sun for now. The streets were busy and, as usual, taxis were the first to rise for passengers. The color gray was prominent in every direction except the blue sky.

“Spare some change?” I didn’t even see the bum beneath the bundle of coats until he spoke up. He looked up at me dully, the mug in his hand jingling.

“No. Don’t got any change,” I said, and hurried by.

“I understand,” the beggar said, and it sounded like he did. I could feel his eyes on my back as he said, “You were in a hurry to get home, so you flew past that red light. You knew it was a red light... didn’t you?”

Another pain went through my skull when I hurried up the steps. That was a mistake. Some grungy old man talking nonsense on the sidewalk. I quickened my pace toward the bus stop a few feet away. Whether the beggar said more, I didn’t want to know. I was pretending I didn’t hear.

Already under the bus top’s canopy was another man waiting. He was dressed in a mechanic’s jumpsuit and looked old and tired. His ebony fingers tapped against the pages of a newspaper as I stepped under the canopy. The man looked over to me with a frown. I could see its disapproval out of the corner of my eye. He was waiting for me to turn. So I did.

“They were on their way home from the circus, y’know,” he said simply. “Right shame it was. She died in the hospital, y’know?”

I walked away again, hands shoved into my pockets and refusing to look back. I didn’t need to take the bus. I needed to get some fresh air. The man returned to his newspaper, pretending that he hadn’t said a word at all.

It was a miracle now that I wasn’t running. My steps moved so fast I was afraid I was going to draw attention. The sidewalk grew more crowded as I walked.

A bored policeman wrote a ticket to a parked car. He looked up when I sped past him. “Getting laid off makes it okay for you to spend your nights getting drunk on your ass in a dive bar?” he said. “You didn’t care if you lived or died did you?”

“—But I guess it wasn’t your fault. It was an accident wasn’t it?” A window washer close by said after the policeman, watching me through the black glass mirrored in front of him.

Everyone now was looking at me. My head frantically turned to see them all on the street. Their eyes turned to me like the next act of a show. My shoulder bumped into a teenager as he walked by with his skateboard under his arm. He angrily turned and shouted at me, “Don’t pretend you don’t remember, man. You saw them pull into that intersection. You saw that red light but floored it anyway!”

“You had to get home though, right? Had to wake up the next morning in your bed to think everything was all right,” the street vendor said with a shake of his head. His hands traded off a hotdog to a young woman for a handful of dollars. His eyes followed me as I ran by.

The young woman turned to watch me as well, “Did you even stop to see if they were all right?” she shouted.

My head turned to see the woman, but still, I kept running until I collided with someone in my path. I looked back to find myself looking at a man in teal scrubs, his white surgical mask specked with red. My lungs burned as I gazed at him, my entire body shook as the pain in my head cleared. I shoved him away, sprinting down the sidewalk. "When you turned on the television today did you see their faces? Why didn't you slow down?" he called out to me.

I crashed with the crowd. I closed my eyes as I pushed past looking to escape. This was all a dream. I fell asleep at the bar or at the restaurant. I must have passed out on the curb. None of this could be real!

All the while their voices collided back down upon me.

"You fell asleep at the wheel, right? It wasn't your fault, right?"

"You didn't even call the police, you didn't call for help. She'd be alive if you just stopped to help them."

"You just wanted it alllll to go away, huh? Deny that it ever happened until you saw it on the news. Gonna turn yourself in, murderer?"

I got free of the crowd, pushing and shoving them away. I was a block away from home. If I could just get there and pack my bags everything would be all right. None of this was right!

"What was it you said when you saw us on the TV?" a soft voice to the left of me asked. I looked up, finding myself standing on the curb of the sidewalk. The asphalt street stood out in front of me like a giant river. Traffic was impatiently stopped for now, waiting for those blinding red lights to turn green. My lungs gasped for air as I turned my head to the left. There standing beside me was a woman, perhaps in her thirties with dark skin and even darker hair. On

either side of her were two boys, no older than ten. They were watching me with wide bright eyes as the woman said, "Were you surprised? Ashamed? Did you even care?"

I continued to breathe, barely managing to gasp out. "I didn't want...to hurt anyone."

She looked at me silently, until slowly she nodded her head like a mother would do when she heard that her son got into a fight between classes in middle school. "I don't think anyone ever does," she said, "But you can't change that now can you?"

I didn't understand, and it showed on my face as she smiled at me. Her eyes were bright as well, lit up by the red traffic light and the taillights of cars. Traffic moved again with a taxi car speeding past me and the woman into the intersection. It was followed by other cars speeding off. The road in front of us seemed to suddenly be a highway in the middle of the city. Their colors formed a blur like a rainbow caught in that ocean of asphalt. Home was just on the other side. I could see my windows from here. I could just imagine Sady looking down wondering where I was and praying that I'd get home safe. But I knew she wasn't there. She'd left a week ago.

Nothing was waiting for me beyond this intersection. I looked back at the woman and her two children. She wasn't looking at me though, instead her gaze was to the sidewalk ahead. I watched in horror as she put one foot onto the asphalt to start to cross. Her children doing the same.

"W-wait, stop!" I called out, my eyes torn from them to see a car coming—a black Volkswagen bearing down with no signs of stopping. My legs worked for me and I found myself dashing forward. I felt my hand on her shoulder and for a brief moment I caught her gaze—scared and alarmed as her children cried out, just like they'd done last night. Time moved by

inches as I watched her fall back down onto the sidewalk. The two boys at her side were pulled down with her, fear in their bright eyes as well. The people from the crowd behind us called out, rushing towards us. I didn't see them reach her.

The car struck me at full speed. Glass breaking as I rolled over the hood and over the roof. Before I knew I was in the air again the asphalt greeted my face. I could hear the car speed off. Its wheels screeching against the road as the sound of the crowd reached us. My gaze was to the sky though, up at a blue morning sky with skyscrapers barely reaching up to the calm air above. Shadows passed over me as an ebony hand landed on my neck to stop the bleeding of a wound I didn't know I had.

The man dressed in a mechanic's jumpsuit leaned over, calling out to the crowd that gathered, "What happened?"

Slowly I found my sight turned to see an Asian woman with bright eyes covering her

mouth and failing to keep control of her emotions. She spoke frantically, "I don't know, he just jumped into the street!"

"I need an ambulance on the corner of West and Stanton!" I heard a police officer say, his ticket forgotten as he spoke into the radio at his chest. He looked down pitifully at me as his voice faded away from my senses. Lips were moving around the crowd above me, but I wasn't able to ask if the woman and her boys were okay.

My eyelids closed as I remembered how dark it was that night. The world had been a blur of traffic lights and headlights, like a rainbow caught out in the street. I fell and my body came along with me, all the time my eyes were held shut. It came suddenly, the sensation of feeling again, and with it an odd unfamiliar scent that sent fresh pain through my head.

I groaned as the world swirled around me, courtesy of a hangover of epic proportions. I knew the feeling well given this was the fifth time this week I've woken up with one...

# Two Hot Chocolates

alex mckay

We saw the body before anyone else did. It was stiff and cold, the last wisps of life lingering at the tips of its splayed remains. The face had been mangled, the nose ripped from its tissue place below the eyes, the eyeballs hanging from their sockets, the mouth drowning in blood and muffling any cry the victim possibly attempted to make. The stomach had been slit down the middle and the ribs were broken, the heart missing from its proper place. Yet I knew it was him. I stared at it in shock with my best friend silently at my side. The wind blew a chill breeze, causing our hair to blow over our eyes and shield the gory scene from our vision. The road beside us, no cars to disturb the silence like a pebble would disrupt the calm of a pond, sending ripples through the wake. The trees swayed noiselessly as if to mourn the death of this being, gently, gently caressing the air with fragrances of pine and cedar.

Before seeing the body, we had been on our way back from the local diner, where we've always met up since we were nine. I had gotten there early as usual, buying two hot chocolates, and waited in one of the booths, mainly the back one by the restrooms where we always sat. I made sure she had extra whipped cream, just as she liked it. She came into the store, wet hair dripping with rain droplets falling from her face and onto the floor. She loved the rain almost as much as I hated it. She glided over to me and sat down gracefully, unlike my clumsy stumble into the booth. It seemed as if she was everything I was not. In beauty, in agility, in personality, and in thought. Her beauty overshadowed my plainness, yet she was unaware of our differences—or chose to ignore them. She took off the cap of her

cup, and stuck her finger into the whipped cream, popping globs of it into her mouth. I grimaced and looked down at my cream-less hot chocolate.

"How was the dream?" she asked after a few seconds of unperturbed silence.

"How did you know about that?" I asked, shocked. She always seemed to know what I had to tell her. She shrugged and continued thrusting cream into her mouth. I sighed.

"It was different this time. I drew a picture of it." I pulled out of my satchel a piece of paper on which I had drawn a heap of bright crimson, orange, yellow, and brown paint sprawled over a distorted face, a black film covering the identity.

She took it from my hands and inspected it, like she always did. Then, she put it down on the table and finished off the whipped cream.

"Is it him?" she asked matter-of-factly.

I defensively snatched the painting back and plunged it back into my bag. "No." I said tersely. We finished our cocoa quietly, and then I watched her push her cup to the side. She finally looked at me with her piercing eyes.

"When are you going to let him go?"

I lowered my eyes sheepishly, feeling the burn of my blushing face give notice to my growing anger. Just the thought of him sent my blood boiling, my mind spinning with thoughts, almost as mixed and jumbled as a schizophrenic's writing. I began to sweat and shake. I felt my friend's hand on mine and instantly I calmed down. The feelings passed, and I looked up at her again. She was always the one to assuage my tempers, my anger. Yet she would never know what it felt like to feel for him, what it felt like to be unable to voice it accurately aloud. My dreams held the secrets, my mind a lock and chain around them; my pictures were the key.

"Let me see the rest of them," she said, and I obediently got them out and laid

them in front of her. There were a total of six pictures. All of them were the same, displaying a young man, a handsome young man, with an expression of wonder in his eyes as he looked off to the side. I admit, I had made him to look like a perfect God, and in my eyes, he was one. I felt as if I had already claimed him for my own, and he would be mine forever. His name was irrelevant because of the love that so greatly poured from my heart; he was my everything.

I had drawn all the pictures one at a time, waking up in the morning to put brush to canvas and capture my dreams through a painting. The boy was in all of my dreams, each night progressing into an even more detailed description of how he was. I never showed the pictures to anyone except for my friend, and the boy never knew of my boundless affection for him.

The bell above the diner's door rang to announce a customer, and everyone instinctively turned to look. The diner rarely had more than five or six customers at a time, so I was surprised to see two police officers walk in and look around. They muttered a greeting to the cook and then proceeded over to an elderly couple nearest to them and began asking them a series of questions, but none I could hear. My friend, who had glanced to see who the new customers were, lost interest and turned back around. But oddly enough, my heart began to quicken and I nervously drummed my fingers on the table. She stared at me, puzzled.

"Would you calm down," she murmured in a tone that was not asking a question. I listened to her, as I only sometimes did, and stopped the incessant rhythm of my fingers hitting the table.

She handed me the pictures and collected my nearly empty cup and hers. She got up to throw them in the trashcan and then strolled back to the booth.

"Come on, let's go for a drive." She smiled at me, and I could not help but smile back. Her smile was contagious; it lit up every corner of the diner with its radiance and had secrets of innocence embedded in its curves. I followed her out to the car and we drove. We drove through the town, past my house, past Old Luther's farm. We drove through trees quilted in oranges, browns, and yellows. We spoke of small things, laughed, and smiled. Thoughts of the boy were temporarily abandoned, and the splendor of the moment replaced them.

We were on a long strip of road, forest on each side of it, when a fox scampered across the street a few feet ahead of the car, and I abruptly skidded to a stop, hearing the tires screech underneath. I watched it scuttle into the nearby bushes, causing golden leaves to fall delicately onto the grass. My friend giggled, excitedly. She loved animals; I despised them.

She leapt out of the car and ran to the bushes. I lowered the window.

"What are you doing?" I asked her. She knelt down to peer through the giant hole where the fox had disappeared. After a few minutes of her poking through the brambles, I grew impatient. "Let's go," I grumbled and parked the car off to the side of the road, just in case a car came behind us. She lifted herself up and ran to my door, enthusiastically. "Let's go follow it!" she said, her eyes boring into mine with intensity. She was always this excited when it came to animals. I sighed and she took my hand and ran over to the bushes' edge, where it began to taper off and make way for tall grass and small trees.

We trampled over the grass, making sure to stay right by the hedges, looking for any sign of red to indicate the fox. I felt stupid for giving in to my friend and instantly became frustrated. I was not in the mood

to chase little animals, I wanted to continue our drive. Yet, I let her hold tight to my hand and pull me deeper into the woods.

We eventually came to a clearing. The rain—which had stopped hours ago—had created a mist over it all, so dense that the sunlight could barely shine down through it. She let go of my hand and we both stared, feeling a sense of intensity that rumbled through the air.

And that's when we found the body.

I stumbled back when I saw it, my stomach twisting in disgust. I wanted to cast my eyes away from it, from the blood, the bones, the pain. Yet I could not peel them away. I gazed in awe at my love, the boy, lying prone on the forest ground in front of me. His beautiful, sculpted face was no longer evident. He stank of death and dirt. I felt my friend's hand on my shoulder and I jumped, coming out of my state. I didn't know if she knew it was him, too. Interrupting the morbid silence, I heard her say, "Let's get out of here." The dim sunlight danced across her face and brightened her hazel eyes, made her short, dark bob glisten with heavenly rays.

We ran back to the car, closing the doors behind us and breathing out huge, white puffs of air. I felt lightheaded and disoriented. I turned to her, panic etched across my face.

"I-I-It was h-him," I stuttered, tears suddenly falling down my face. Sympathy filled her eyes.

"I know," she whispered. The tears ran faster down my cheeks. I wanted to go somewhere, anywhere. I found myself starting the engine, pulling back onto the road and driving back the way we came. We drove in silence, my friend always aware of when to keep quiet. I did not know where I was going, but as the trees gave way to houses and fences, I realized I was heading back to the diner. I needed familiarity, the recent

events were scary, uncharted waters and I wanted to be far away from it. I parked the car haphazardly and staggered, grabbing my satchel on the way. My friend followed suit and we walked back to our booth. I ordered two more hot chocolates, needing something to clear my head.

We sat across from each other once more. The elderly couple had left. The police were still there, questioning a mother and her young son.

I contemplated telling the cops what we found, and shuddered at the thought.

"You should tell them," my friend said. She stuck her finger in the whipped cream, absentmindedly. I was in too much shock over the boy to realize that she knew yet again what I was thinking. I shook my head hard and sipped at my hot chocolate. The police finished with the mother and came closer to us, stopping at a man who looked as if he had just been released from the town's penitentiary. My heart began to quicken again.

"You should tell them," my friend said again and I glared at her angrily. I began twiddling my thumbs in my lap, in sync with my racing heartbeat.

"Why?"

"You know why."

I stopped twiddling my thumbs and looked at her in confusion. What was she talking about? I voiced this aloud and she eyed my satchel which lay in my lap. I grabbed it and brought it closer to me.

It was at this point that I heard thumping, a severe and fierce thumping from my bag. It pulsed and vibrated through to my hands, causing a chill to run down my spine. I dropped the satchel in shock and looked at my friend for an answer. She stared at me, sorrow in her eyes. I had never seen that from her before in the seven years we had known



each other. This time, she did not tell me to calm down, even as the police began to finish their interrogation with the man near us.

"You know what you did," she spoke sadly. I recoiled from her response in utter puzzlement, ready to defend my innocence and yet...

"What?" I cried. The thumping in my satchel continued to rumble, almost at the same pace as my beating heart. My friend sat still in front of me. I searched my mind for what she could possibly be talking about, yet I only came up with fleeting images, like pieces to a puzzle that I had no idea how to amalgamate.

Yesterday! It was him! I remember now. There he was! In the woods, where I so often went to paint the face of my love. He had finally walked past me and saw me like I had seen him every night in my dreams. He did not say hello when I reached for him like I wished him to, instead, he recoiled from my outstretched fingers, staring at me as if I was crazy. His face was a series of angelic strokes of perfection, his hair a soft heap upon his head. He had loved me in the dream; surely, he was ready to love me now. I was beginning to announce my undying adulation for him, and just knew he would reciprocate, if not with a stronger passion. His eyes passed over me, but I grabbed his hand to keep him from walking away. Couldn't he see? I was all for him! I was his heart's desire! I was his beautiful love! Why couldn't he know that?

I had forced him to look into my eyes, even as he tried to wring away from my clingy grab. I knew I was bothering him, and yet I could not let go. He had to know my love for him; he just had to. Smiling, I pulled out the pictures to show him how much I cared, how much I yearned for his love. He took them from my hands and gazed at them in disgust. He finally looked at me with purpose in his eyes.

"What is this?" he boomed, and my smile faded.

"Do you not like them?" I asked. In response, he shoved them back into my hand, pulling free of my other one.

"You don't even know me, you freak," he mumbled and began to walk off.

"No! Wait! I do know you! I do! Look!" I shouted and I pulled out more and more pictures, pictures I had stashed away in piles around my room, pictures of him in various poses, pictures of us that I painted of him giving me flowers, of him holding me, of him—

"Get away from me," he said and backed away from me, cautiously, as if I was a dangerous rabid animal.

My stomach cringed. I felt sick, confused. Why? WHY?! What's going on? He was supposed to love me. WHY DIDN'T HE LOVE ME?! Sweat fell from my brow. Tears fell from my eyes as I began to weep in despair. Then, the tears suddenly stopped, and I began to shake with rage. A growl emitted from deep within my throat and I charged at him with animosity. He was taken aback by my adrenaline-fueled strength. He had no time to defend himself before I dug my fingers into his eyes, plunging them out of his sockets, using my nails to scrape at his face. If I could not have him for my own, then no one could. I left cuts and bloody marks on his angelic face, as he shrieked and writhed on the ground in pain. I remained on top of him, my fingers searching for the painting knife I kept in my satchel. Grabbing it in a fury, I sliced it into his nose. His hand came up to stop me, but I knocked it away with a sharp blow. I then used the knife to tear open his chest, breaking his ribs with forceful punches. He screamed in pain, and I let the shrill sound ease my hurt feelings. I let it flow into my ears like music. I placed my hand gently on

his heart, feeling it pump underneath me, warm and slippery. I closed my eyes, letting the rhythm become one with mine, as I wished it to be from the beginning. Then, I opened them and brought my lips close to his ear. He had stopped screaming and I did not know if he had fainted or if death had clamped its slithery fingers around his soul. I didn't care. I caressed the edge of his ear with my lips, my fingers still on the heart.

"Awwwwwwwwww," I whispered. "I think I just broke your heart."

I ripped the organ from its moor, feeling its warmth in my hands, and its beating gradually came to a stop between my fingers. I held it in my arms for a moment before putting the pictures back into my satchel and walked away, calmly, calmly... I trembled and winced at the memory.

"No," I cried quietly, not wanting to believe what I had done. My friend continued to stare, continued to remain quiet. I pulled out the picture, the one I had drawn last night. I eyed the colors, the reds and oranges I had spilled over the face, covered in black, the boy no longer familiar.

The police came closer to us. We were the last ones in the diner to be spoken to. They made their way over in a stoic manner, their faces rigid and serious. My heart felt like it was going to tear through my skin and plop onto the table. I grabbed my satchel to my chest, and my attention was brought back to the thumping within it. I lifted the flap, and carefully, carefully put my hand inside, my fingers clasping over something warm and slippery. A cry broke loose from my lips as I pulled out the heart of the boy. The police continued their walk over. I looked at my friend.

"I'm not crazy," I whispered, more to myself than to her, reassuring myself that I could not possibly have done something so evil. I heard a laugh, an almost guttural, demonic laugh, which escaped from her mouth. Her eyes turned dark and she looked through me with unflinching concentration.

"Aren't you?" she asked and suddenly she was gone, and I was left by myself with two police officers, a heart, my cup, and one untouched hot chocolate with whipped cream on top.

# Neurons Below

haley talley

It must have been a miscommunication between how I felt, and how those feelings manifested. Even as I buckle my seatbelt using the motions my hands would never forget and absentmindedly tuck my bag under the seat in front of me, the man next to me smiles in my direction, reassuring and steady.

“Nervous flyer?” he says, loosening his tie as he does.

“Not really, actually,” I say back, but he doesn’t hear me, and if he does, he’s already decided that I’m lying. He chuckles and pats my arm, as he shimmies himself into a comfortable position to ensure me that he has indeed flown before, and that I need not worry.

“No need to worry,” He says just moments after I think it. “I mean, the odds of dying in a plane crash are,” he gestures obscurely with his hands, “next to nothing.”

I don’t mention to him that planes still crash, or that we have the same odds as any plane, or that I’ve been on more flights than I have bus rides, or, most importantly, that I’m not scared.

It always happens this way. I feel safe flying, safer than I feel doing anything else in the world, aside from my job. I consider myself naturally anxious all the time, except when I’m flying. Going to the airport, checking my bags, airline food, it all makes me so comfortable that it’s almost unnatural.

But I get pegged as a nervous flyer every time. I’ve been pulled aside by more flight attendants than I can count, with their smooth blouses and perfectly coiffed hair, asking if I need some assistance, if I’m going to be okay. When I was young, it frustrated me that I couldn’t figure out why. Now, I only find it frustrating that there isn’t a thing I can do about it.

“Harry,” the man says, this time extending his hand to me. “Don’t worry, we’ll be fine.” I take it and shake, smiling as convincingly as I can.

“Anne,” I say back. “Thanks.” If that makes him feel better, and I can almost guarantee that it does, I pretend not to notice. I let him feel like he’s eased me from my nervousness.

The flight takes only two hours, gate to gate. During the ascent, as I’m not busy returning Harry’s constant “We’re okay” smiles, I stare out my window and watch the ground slowly crawl by thousands of feet below. Flying at night is always my favorite. The soft patterns of lights and the web of streets are brilliant from so far up. The roads dip and turn and sway, like rivers of gray speckled with light.

I always imagine I’m floating up here, hovering above a network of neurons that fires people like ideas from place to place. They soar along and leap their invisible synapses until they’re in a new place entirely. None of those people can feel the weight of their importance from down there, can’t feel when they’re in an entirely new neuron, a new mind, a new being.

People are more like thoughts than anything. So vastly unimportant on their own, merely fragments of concepts and minds. They aren’t worth anything until you get them together. They combine in a million ways, making a billion new things. Always dying, always creating, always traveling to places for reasons they can’t explain to do things they feel like they are meant to do.

I feel different when I’m on the ground. Watching the world shift and recombine when I am so zoomed in is exhausting. But in the air, I’m removed, I step back, and somehow the world still turns without me.

The captain signals for our descent, and I

## FICTION

am stuck on my window, waiting for the moments when the horizon will begin to stretch beyond my window. Being up here, being down there, the world can hardly tell the difference. And as we come back down, I become a neuron, a thought, a tiny dash of light that travels without knowing what it's doing except that it must do something. I don't think I have ever been a nervous flyer for fear of going up; I think I am more afraid of coming back down.

We land. I've forgotten my metaphor by the time the wheels scrape the tarmac. I don't remember leaving the airport, not when I've done it so many times, not when I've wedged the routine into my head. It's not until I am in my taxi that I breathe and begin to decide where I'll be staying, how long I'll be there, and when I will be fired, headfirst, all the way back.

# Yam Story

luke deitz

There's nothing like a good yam to stick underneath the door of someone you dislike. Whether it's someone you work with, someone at school, or just a pesky third partier, the old yam under the door trick is a great way to channel negative feelings into a harmless and even enjoyable pastime.

I began this hobby in my late thirties. I lived in a busy town and often found myself getting stuck in traffic on my way to pick up a bagel and coffee. One Friday morning in December, I was running late. As I drove to work, I realized I wasn't going to have time to pick up a bagel. Almost immediately after having this realization, I saw a market on the side of the road closing up. I pulled into the lot and an older man explained to me that the winter had been harsher and so his crop had suffered. He pointed to many yams that were damaged from the weather and rain. He told me he was about to close up for the year and welcomed me to take anything I wanted. I grabbed several yams, maybe nine or ten, and stuffed them in my briefcase.

I arrived to the office half past nine and my boss was very displeased. I apologized, and then began my work. A little after ten, my boss called me into the back. He told me I was a dead weight and a burden on sales. He then told me that I was to pack up all my things and leave by the end of the day. I remember feeling so angry I could kick a hole in the wall, but I kept my composure. I went back to my desk and sat down. I opened my briefcase to pack up, and then saw the dirty yams I had grabbed earlier that morning.

Bruised and mashed, many were leaking yammy fluids that escaped out from the holes of my briefcase and damped the carpeted floor. I grabbed them carefully, to keep them from falling into worse

condition, and lined the poor things all along my workspace. There they sat, discolored and deformed, like a tiny yam army. I chuckled, before grabbing the largest one and taking a bite out of it. It was cold and wet...a bit stringy, not in texture, but in taste...it was mostly soft, but contained icy chunks that were more solid.

As I sat, my boss came out to make sure I was packing up. From his position in the room he could not see my yams, as they were hidden beneath an elevated part of the desk. He gave me a solemn look, and then returned to the back. Then it hit me. I grabbed as many of the yams as I could, hugging them against my chest. Their juices seeped and spilled over me, and one slipped from my arms and fell to the floor with a spletch sound. I raced to his door, letting the rest of the yams fall to the ground. I kneeled in front of the yams and peered out at them. One by one, I placed the pitiful things in front of me. Because they were so soft, it was an easy task to flatten them each underneath my knees. I then placed each squashed yam under the door. The floor and my workpans were drenched with water by the time I was done. I brushed the yam bits off my hands and clothes and stood up, glancing out to see if any of my coworkers had witnessed my handiwork. No one had seemed to mind, so I walked to my desk, gathered my belongings, and left the building.

I am now seventy-four and still enjoy my yam hobbies. On cold winter mornings, I think back to the first time that started it all; everything seems so long ago now. Throughout my life, I have acquired thousands of yams. For organizational purposes, I keep them in labeled moving boxes. Unfortunately, now I often find myself forgetting to label, or forgetting what month it is, or what year it is, so the labeling system doesn't help much. The boxes with older yams are more often than not darker due to all the liquid and decay. That's how I can usually tell.

When I was younger, I spent a weekend cleaning some old boyhood items out of my attic in order to redesign it as a yam storage space. As I acquired more and more boxes, the attic became more and more cluttered. Eventually, I decided that the attic was full and I was going to just have to use the rest of the house for my boxes. One morning, a loud noise woke me up. It was a muffled sound, like someone had fallen in another room of a house. I got up and found that a stack of boxes had toppled over up in the attic. Smashed yams and squirming bugs were everywhere. The whole area smelled musty and dank. That was the last time I went up into my attic. Dried yam juice now stains my walls and ceilings in the room underneath the attic. I am now too old and my body is too weak to attempt to climb up into the attic and look around. I don't want to anyway. I prefer to think of my attic in the condition it was in when I first started using it as a yam storage unit (YSU).

I rarely leave my home because I know there are people outside who want my yams. I don't want anyone to take them without asking. Every day, I keep vigilant and watch them. I have a window in my room I like to sit at as I watch passersby. You may be one of those people. If you are, just come inside and sit down. No need to be a stranger. I'll tell you some stories. You can come inside and we will talk for a bit. I could heat up some yam stew. I've got so many yams, so if you want to pick up a good and fun hobby, I will be able to supply you with the resources you need to start up. I sure would like a friend. I know you have someone in your life you dislike, probably a few. Everyone does. So what are you waiting for? These yams are the softest yams you'll ever come across.

# The Light of Trust

stephen howard

Imagine a spark. It is surrounded by darkness, nothing tangible and nothing to see or know beyond its flickering light. It is tremendously alone.

The spark wanders, casting its faint light wherever it goes. It is afraid, alone. It has yet to know anything beyond its light and the ever-present dark.

After a while, the spark spots a breakage in the darkness. In the distance lies a speck of light, presumably emanating from a spark much like itself. What should it do?

Should it seek out the other spark, adding their light together to starve off a little more of the night?

Should it run far away for fear that the other may extinguish or steal its own light?

Or should it watch the other spark flicker away, receding into the unknown, forever a mystery?

The darkness around the frail spark seemed darker, more crushing. The little light decided to approach the new phenomenon.

As it grew closer, the first spark noticed that the other was observing him. Likely, it too was battling within itself over how to approach the situation.

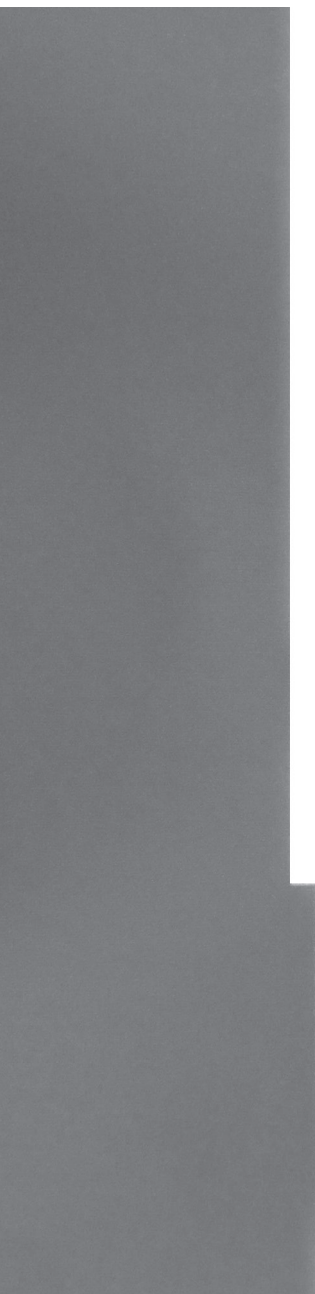
Eventually, the darkness was pushed away a bit more as the two sparks stood contemplating the other. Around them, their feeble lights flickered and danced. So very frail, the sparks were terrified of the other.

But the deep blackness around them held its own terrors.

And so the sparks joined as one, emitting a brighter light, pushing back the crushing nothing. What lay in store for them, they did not know. But, for now, the darkness was not so thick, and the world a little less lonely.

stephen howard

## FICTION





# Ever After Only

david boyd

THEODORE

Look, baby, it's not like that!

ALLYSON

Right. Right, okay. What-the-hell-ever.

THEODORE

It's not! Look, I only did it for the Vine!

ALLYSON

For the Vine? For the Vine? and what the hell happened to me?

THEODORE

I only have eyes for you, baby.

ALLYSON

Oh! Okay, but you have hands and a camera for those two skanks!

THEODORE

I didn't even know them!

[ALLYSON throws her hands up and lets out an UGGGHHH.]

ALLYSON

Are you hearing yourself at ALL?  
[she pours herself a shot and throws it back.]

THEODORE

Oh yeah? Well, what about Jake?

[ALLYSON gasps. Her eyebrows become an angry V.]

ALLYSON

Oh! Oh, okay! What about Jake, oh this should be good.

THEODORE

Yeah, exactly, what about Jake?

ALLYSON

Theo, I'm warning you, do not go there.

THEODORE

Don't go there? Don't go there? You should have gone there—

ALLYSON

Theo—

THEODORE

with a handle of Captain Jerry's—

ALLYSON

Theo, I'm warning you—

THEODORE

in a slutty angel costume—

ALLYSON

Theo—

THEODORE

and it wasn't even Halloween—

ALLYSON

Theodore, stop it stop it stop—

THEODORE

and popped a molly with him!

ALLYSON

You are so unbearable! I cannot believe you!

THEODORE

Go eat mollies with stupid Jake!

ALLYSON

Go do hanky-panky with your Vine sluts!

THEODORE

Fine!

ALLYSON

Fine!

THEODORE

We are so over!

ALLYSON

COMPLETELY over!

THEODORE

I'm leaving!

david boyd

## FICTION

ALLYSON

Bye!

[THEODORE exits stage right. ALLYSON kneels down with the bottle of Bacardi 151 and begins to cry.]

END SCENE.

[THEODORE is sitting on his longboard at stage left, smoking a cigarette.

ALLYSON is stage right at a computer. She is deleting Facebook photos in an aggressive manner, which is much less satisfying than tearing up hardcopy photos in an aggressive manner.]

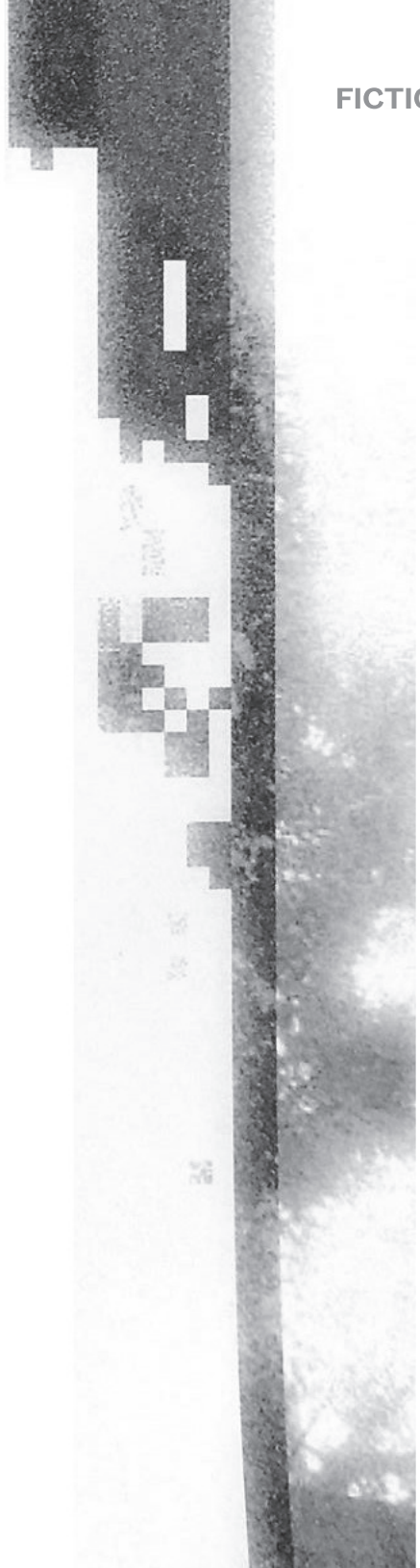
ALLYSON

Are you sure? Yes I'm damn sure! Delete!  
Our Mets game? Remove from my Wall!  
IFC formal, oh my GOD delete. Yes  
I'm damn sure. Am I sure I'm sure? I just  
said I'm sure! Why are you making it so  
hard to get rid of him?!

END SCENE.

FICTION: END HERE

FICTION: END HERE



NON-FICTION: BEGIN HERE

**NON**

sequoya review

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NON-FICTION

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sequoya review

# Dragon Breath

cameron morgan

Consider the flying lantern: a small hot air balloon made of paper with an opening at the bottom where the fire is lit. And they send up hundreds every year, embers flickering over the Great Wall, to rural lands, west and south. Flammable wax wrapped delicately in oil paper and propped up with bamboo, the sky lanterns string among the stars like fairy lights on the colonial in winter.

They extinguish in the morning, strung on the double-wide in summer, breathing their last flame.

They land in my father's hand, and he tells me he is a great dragon, inhaling the ashes and breathing out the cloying smoke they give off from his nostrils. Late at night, he breathes in slowly from the opening at the bottom, through the delicate paper, and blows out in a dense cloud. When he doesn't know, I look near the end where the lanterns float in embers and watch the smoke flow up and curl inside itself infinitely.

A great incense burns in my father's hands, smelling bitter and sweet, sometimes like peppermint. It sinks into my clothes and his pillowcases. And when I am too scared to sleep in my own room, I shove him over in bed and breathe in the scent of two-day hair and smoke. I can see the paper lanterns slowly going out on his bed-side table, glowing inside the pile of ashes.

During WWII the Japanese made a great sky lantern called Fu-go. Propelled over the Atlantic, into my father's hands, with incendiary devices on the bottom, they explode in his hands, and the dragon's slow, rolling smoke turns black.

His lungs are tarnished with sky lanterns, lighting up like coals in his abdomen under the MRI. They burn black spots in his lungs. His smoke smells like bitter blood coursing, churning, curling up around his lips.

My father's hands shake as he holds the lantern up to his lips, just to smell the thick tar. He's peering into the end as he breathes in and the embers light.

He says they'll fill him with the same chemical as the Fu-go: formaldehyde.

We burned him like the hollow end of a sky lantern, and I can see his smoke coming up from the chimney. Thick and black. Curling infinitely.

The lanterns have fallen into the sand contained in floral pots, stamped out in the street. The festivals of lights are over.

# How Far Do Dead Fish Float?

zach nicholson

The water I stand in swirls and changes and would sweep me away if water was everything, but water wills where stones sit still, so I stand upon the stones that have always grounded me.

Those stones are why I'm here. I push my hand through the water, grab the underbelly earth and bring it to my face. Out of water, the earth is different—smaller and finite. It's not an image that sways with invisible currents, but a solid thing in a solid place. It doesn't grow. It doesn't breathe. It's a fish out of water, dead on arrival. It's a rock and it's mine.

So I take the earth in parts. Every day I come to the creek and take more of its bed, but the creek never says anything. After weeks of scavenging, I own too many rocks, but I need more. I create a hierarchy for my earth; I divide and categorize. Three kinds of rocks become important to me: fossils, Indian money, and perfect skipping stones. I would hunt these from now on.

I later learned that Indian money is neither Indian, nor money. Rather, Indian money is a name forced upon fossilized crinoids by the children of Midwest America. Crinoids have other names, too. They're called sea lilies and feather stars. But I didn't know of lilies and feathers and stars as a kid. I had a creek for an ocean. I grabbed dead fish and called them Indian money.

Beds are nice until there's not enough room to fit everyone that wants to lie down because they're tired and because they can sleep anywhere with anyone in any condition, but you know I've only got the one bed. It's a twin size not extra-long

and not particularly comfortable, and it's the only place I can lay still, the only place I can stop thinking, the only place I have and you're taketaketaking it all in your sleep as I wait for morning.

I live next to the creek for eight years and pilfer its bed for the last three. I throw every stolen stone into the drawers next to my own bed. After three years, the drawers screech with effort, heavy with earth, and I stop opening them.

Suddenly, my family is moving. I am moving. Nothing is staying still. The water is everything, and I've left no stone to stand upon. The past three years of my life disappear overnight—left in a drawer, thrown away, something inconsequential—and I don't notice. I have no time for rocks. Everything here feels alive. The new house has a creek right in the backyard and this creek talks. It whoops and hollers as it crushes the stones underneath, and the stones stay silent and bleed. The creek bed is shrouded in earthblood and I can't see the bottom.

I need my shoes—something between the muddy unknown of the creekbed and my bare feet—because these stones aren't mine. The talking creek roars at me, dares me to take one. But I don't care for water or stones any more.

Past the creek and farther into the woods is what I want now. An abandoned shack stands crooked and alone. Its four wood walls are peeling and slant to my left. Time and rain eroded the insides, but the shack is still solid. One night I bring my sleeping bag to the shack. The shack groans as I lie down. Maybe it will change when I sleep? I wake up to see the same shack standing in the same offset position. The faraway morning roar of the talking creek reminds me of time, so I grab my sleeping bag and leave, not taking anything from the shack.

zach nicholson

## NON-FICTION

It's easy to look down and see dead fish in the water if you only think a few days ahead like my mom always said, but I haven't seen her since the last time I saw the creek. That February was years ago, so I'm looking days ahead and years behind at dead fish and Indian money as I lay in some bed that isn't mine, in some house that isn't home, with some person so asleep they might be dead. I want to say movemovemove, but I gave up water fourteen years ago and all that's left is still.

zach nicholson



# I Don't See Me on TV

conni boykins

Man oh man, television. Both the best and worst procrastination companion in my life. Between Netflix, Hulu+, and countless other Internet TV platforms, if I can't find something to watch it's because I am being extremely picky. With the amount of TV I consume I'm rarely at a loss for what to watch, especially because I will watch pretty much anything. Reality shows, sitcoms, crime/courtroom dramas, murder mysteries, cartoons, sci-fi, anything. I have no standards. Well, that's a lie. I have some standards. The show has to have at least one actor/actress/person I like and has to have at least one character I can relate to. I often settle for a show meeting only the first criterion because, I don't know if you noticed, but it's hard out here for characters of color. And by 'hard' I mean that there are approximately four of them. Okay that's an understatement, and it would be unfair if I ignored the fact that POC (People of Color) are on an entertainment upswing. Especially the ladies. And don't get me wrong, I love seeing more WOC (Women of Color) on the silver screen. Wholeheartedly love it. But is it so much to ask for representation AND relatability? There are a whole host of shows with entirely (or predominantly) white casts of various income levels, occupations, family dynamics, belief systems, etc. etc. and I'm left scrambling for secondary, underdeveloped characters who are challenged only by offensive stereotypes. And, okay, POC are not always pushed aside and more of them, specifically women, are being written as lead roles, but I would be straight up lying if I said I could relate to an Indian OB/GYN or an African-American, DC-based crisis manager. You

know what I can relate to? A black chick in college who is trying to figure her life out and not murder every ignorant soul around her who thinks they're qualified to speak on what is and is not racist in 2014.

And you might be thinking, but you're in college!! You're a twenty something!!! There are tons of shows about twenty-somethings trying to figure their lives out. True. But there is not a single level on which I can connect with four insanely privileged white chicks who, despite living in FREAKING BROOKLYN, NY, never encounter any people of ANY KIND OF COLOR save for one black dude who was a throwaway one-night-stand-type of deal where the joke was that he was Republican.

I don't see me on TV. Well I do, but I also really and truly don't. And before you say "If you want a show about black girls make one," just don't. Because, honestly, if I made the show would anyone even see it? Would the people that need to see it the most get to watch it? The answer is probably no. Because guess what, people don't want to see black girls in college figuring stuff out and calling out ignorance. People like to see angry black women running DC, or hopeless romantics trying to find love and coping with the fact that they were only just cut off even though they are 25, or women from the projects constantly trying to get their child support, or men doling out helpful dating advice to their awkward white friends who don't know how to function in bars and dance clubs. That's what people like to see. It's what they're comfortable with. I'm comfortable with it too. After all, I watch TV every single day, which solidifies these ideas.

But I'm still annoyed. Because as they say, "You can't be what you can't see." And the truth is, I don't see me at all.

conni boykins

# Undeclared Weight

summer lund

## Fall 2010 and Spring 2011

I remember the first time I watched Asher Roth's music video for the song "I Love College." The whole video was shot around one scene of a crazy college party. There was alcohol everywhere, attractive men and women grinding on each other and stripping, and a general disposition of not giving a fuck about anything. I remember my heart beating fast in anticipation of the fun, excitement, and freedom I was going to experience for the next four years.

I remember my first week of college. My roommate was weird. I cried in the shower for seven days straight. I didn't know what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wasn't good at making friends, and I spent a majority of my time alone in my dorm, watching Netflix.

I remember the first few months of freshman year. I got dark circles under my eyes and lost ten pounds. I made so many flash cards that my hands ached. The only crazy party I attended was chapel twice a week.

I remember deciding to transfer. I hated that first year; next year would be better.

## Fall 2011 and Spring 2012

I remember hoping sophomore year would be better.

I remember declaring to be "Undeclared" when I transferred to my new school. I wondered if that was true for more than just my major. I remember feeling lost in a new scene. I remember the first day of classes. "Hi, my name is Summer. I'm a sophomore."

I remember wondering why there wasn't a microwave on campus. I remember wondering why books were so expensive when I was already taking out loans. I remember that the on-campus Wi-Fi took forever to set up. I remember when my advisor didn't remember me. I remember wondering why I couldn't get into the one class I definitely needed. I remember when I had to park in the yellow zone three days in a row. I remember hiking up Cardiac Hill twice a day to repay my meter. I remember wondering why life wasn't convenient.

I remember getting hired at Old Navy. I remember working eighteen hours a week plus full-time school and homework. I remember that I didn't have a choice. I remember that I had to commute forty-five minutes both ways. I remember that I didn't live on campus because it was too expensive. I remember that gas money was too expensive.

I remember napping on the third floor of Lupton with my backpack strapped to my feet. I remember napping in the reading room in Holt. I remember napping on the sidewalk outside of Holt. I remember accidentally napping in class. I guess I could've just taken some Adderall to stay awake. I don't remember sleeping.

## Fall 2012 and Spring 2013

I remember wondering if I had picked the right major. I remember changing my major three times. I remember wondering if I would ever find a job with my degree. I remember wondering if I should just drop out. I remember wondering why I wanted to go to college in the first place. I remember asking my advisor what he thought about my major. I don't remember what he said. I remember the sound of exhaustion and boredom in my voice as I made the traditional First Day announcement of my status as an upperclassman.

## NON-FICTION

I remember the first time I got written up at work. I had to worry about school grades and pay grades. I remember when my dad was in the hospital and I had to stay with him. I remember when my face broke out from stress. I remember my palms sweating the first time I had to give a presentation alone.

I remember eating lunch alone, in my car. I remember working on projects alone. I remember doing group projects and still feeling alone. I remember spending hours in my own little library cubicle. I remember feeling detached.

I remember devoting six hours to homework every night. I remember preparing for speeches, writing research papers, completing online homework, taking midterms, taking finals, and chewing my nails while waiting to receive my final grades. I don't remember having a disposition of not giving a fuck.

### Fall 2013 and Spring 2014

I remember waiting in line at the bookstore for the fourth time in a row. I remember my arms aching from the weight of six hundred dollars "well spent." I remember having my phone shut off because I couldn't afford it. I remember hoping the fumes in my gas tank would be enough to get me home. I remember eating ramen noodles three times a day for two weeks straight. I remember wishing I had more time to work.

I remember when the air in my car stopped working. I remember when the transmission in my car stopped working. I remember when my tires went flat. I remember when my battery died. I remember when my door handle snapped off. I remember thinking that, like dogs, vehicles start to look like their owners.

I remember the night my Chaucer class was cancelled because of the snow. I remember

comparing the imagery of the snow and its equation to death, to my Chaucer class. I remember wondering why such a hellish class would be required. I remember thinking Chaucer would be the cause of my death.

I remember driving to school, thinking, "If I drove into that lake, I wouldn't have to go to class today."

I remember driving to school, thinking, "If I drove off that cliff, I wouldn't have to go to class today."

I remember driving to school, thinking, "If I drove through that red light, I wouldn't have to go to class today."

I remember being caught in the waiting game: waiting for grades, waiting for registration to open, waiting to buy books, waiting to do homework, waiting to finish a paper, waiting to graduate, waiting for real life to begin. Wondering if real life had already begun, and hoping it hadn't.

### Fall 2014 and Spring 2015

I remember my three-year anniversary at Old Navy. They gave me a lapel pin instead of a raise. I remember wishing I could find a job closer to home. I remember wishing I could find a job that would pay more. I remember wishing I could find a job with more flexible hours. I remember that no one is hiring.

I remember feeling the onset of "senioritis." I think I had it last year, too. I don't remember anyone telling me that college could take more than four years.

I remember when I used to have free time. I remember when I looked forward to school. I remember when I thought a college degree guaranteed me a job after graduation. I remember wishing it would be over sooner. #isitmayyet

I remember wondering what was taking so long. I remember wondering, "Do I end up happy?"

# Memories of a Friend

siri alay

I remember my new bike. You had a go-kart your brother, Tom, built; you drove it. And when we arrived at our destination—the makeshift kickball field—I remember we promised to never leave. There were...

Mudholes dug into the grass with our fingernails marked with bandana flags. The golf club. You swung. It cracked. I don't think I've seen you paler than then. I laughed, nervously. I was dizzy. Not sure if I was supposed to feel the hurt I didn't. My head was warm and wet. I touched it, felt red, screamed bloody murder, oh goodness but I wasn't hurt until then.

Tom came. He cradled my head. Carried me across a line of wilting tomatoes into the house. Away from the tree we had climbed and in which we had built a tree house.

The nest fell out of a nearby tree and we carried it back up to our tree fortress. Three speckled robin eggs. One hatched in two days—the fragile, naked bird broke through its membrane, croaking for a mother. Or alma mater. We found an earthworm and laid it by the side of shattered eggshells.

The next day, the bird was dead. An army of ants callously drilled a bullet hole into its neck. We should plan a funeral. Write an obituary. Headline: "Bird shot dead by army ants!"

The creek is dry now. As we are also. Our ties are hollow.

There were bouquets of honeysuckle by the trickle of runoff we called The Creek. You showed me how to eat a honeysuckle. Pinch the end; pull the pistil through the bottom of the flower, scooping ambrosia along the way. Scatter the petals across the water and touch the tip of the pistil to the tip of your tongue.

Taste naïveté once again?

See carpeted tresses of curling grass coalescing with brown hair as we stared at clouds. A frog. A dinosaur. A face. A fire truck. Were the shapes in our minds or the clouds? The clouds were more stable than us after all; they passed through us when they settled on the ground.

I left

The promise broken.  
Volatile and vulnerable,  
Like our youth.

But you still exist. As a child. In my mind.  
And some nights I wonder...  
Where are you really?

**NON-FICTION: END HERE**

**NON-FICTION: END HERE**

## INTERVIEW

# An Interview with *River Talk* author CB Anderson

“In writing *River Talk*, I was influenced by the landscape of western Maine, where I grew up—the foothills of the White Mountains and the river valleys...Initially there was no overarching theme. I focused more on the particulars of each story. It was only after the book was finished that I realized it was about endurance, both of the land and of the people who inhabit it. The landscape, in its beauty and its ability to withstand the artifacts of human enterprise, turned out to be a central character.”

“When I write, I usually begin with a situation or context that interests me. Then I wait for characters to show up and people the situation...Once I have characters, I write with something my son said in mind. Several years ago, he and my daughter were outside on the patio—I’d made tea and they’d sat and listened to a story I’d just finished. My daughter, who was probably 15, said, ‘Oh, I loved it, the descriptions of places and the people.’ Just what I wanted to hear! Then Erik, who was 10, said, ‘Well, Mom, that’s another story in which not a whole lot happens.’ So now I’m always asking: What’s happened so far? What’s going to happen?”

“In terms of the writing itself, it’s important to maintain a balance between scene and exposition. Beginning writers are told ‘Show, don’t tell.’ But too much ‘showing’ can bore the reader. The reader relies on the writer for synthesis, which necessarily takes the form of telling. You need showing to impart a sense of immediacy, but you need telling to connect with your reader and give the story pushback.”

Described in a Kirkus starred review as “a triumphant, probing debut that promises both literary and mass appeal,” *River Talk* is a collection of short stories published by C&R Press in 2014. CB Anderson (cbanderson.net) is a cross-genre writer who has won the New Millennium Award, the Crazyhorse Prize, and the Mark Twain Award for short fiction. She teaches writing at Boston University.

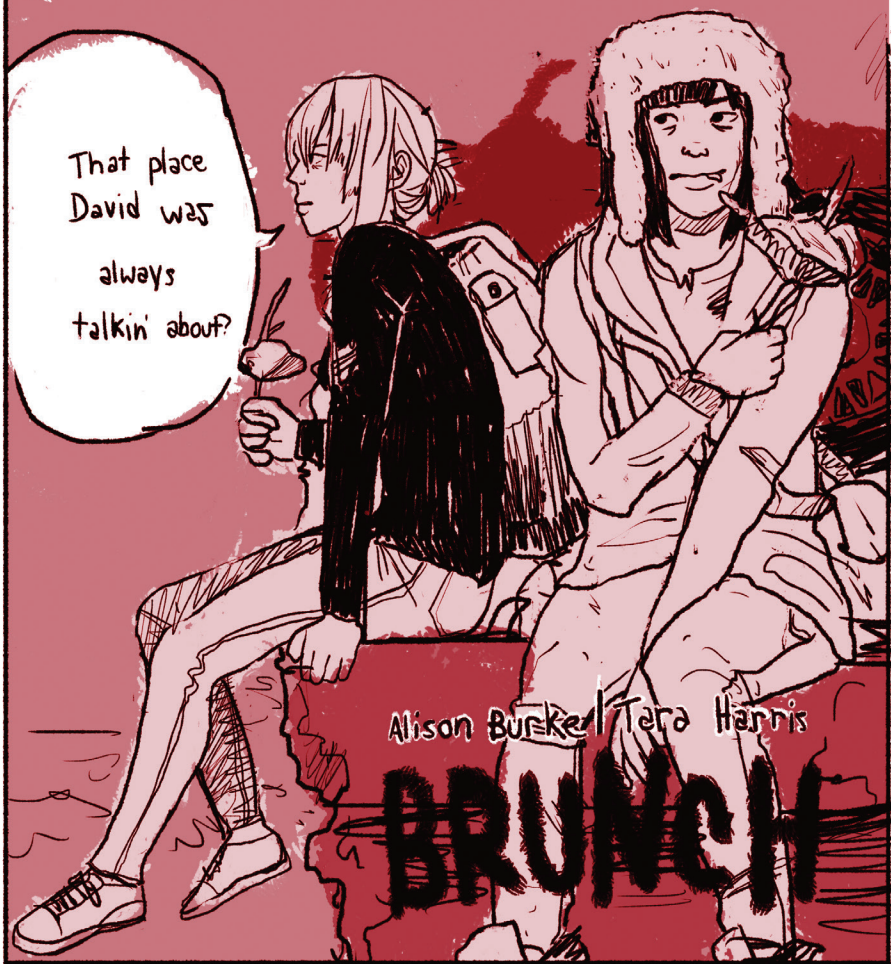
—E.L. Cahoon  
Editor-in-Chief  
*Sequoia Review*

FICTION



Did you ever have brunch  
at that place in Inman?

That place  
David was  
always  
talkin' about?



Alison Burke / Tara Harris

BRUNCH



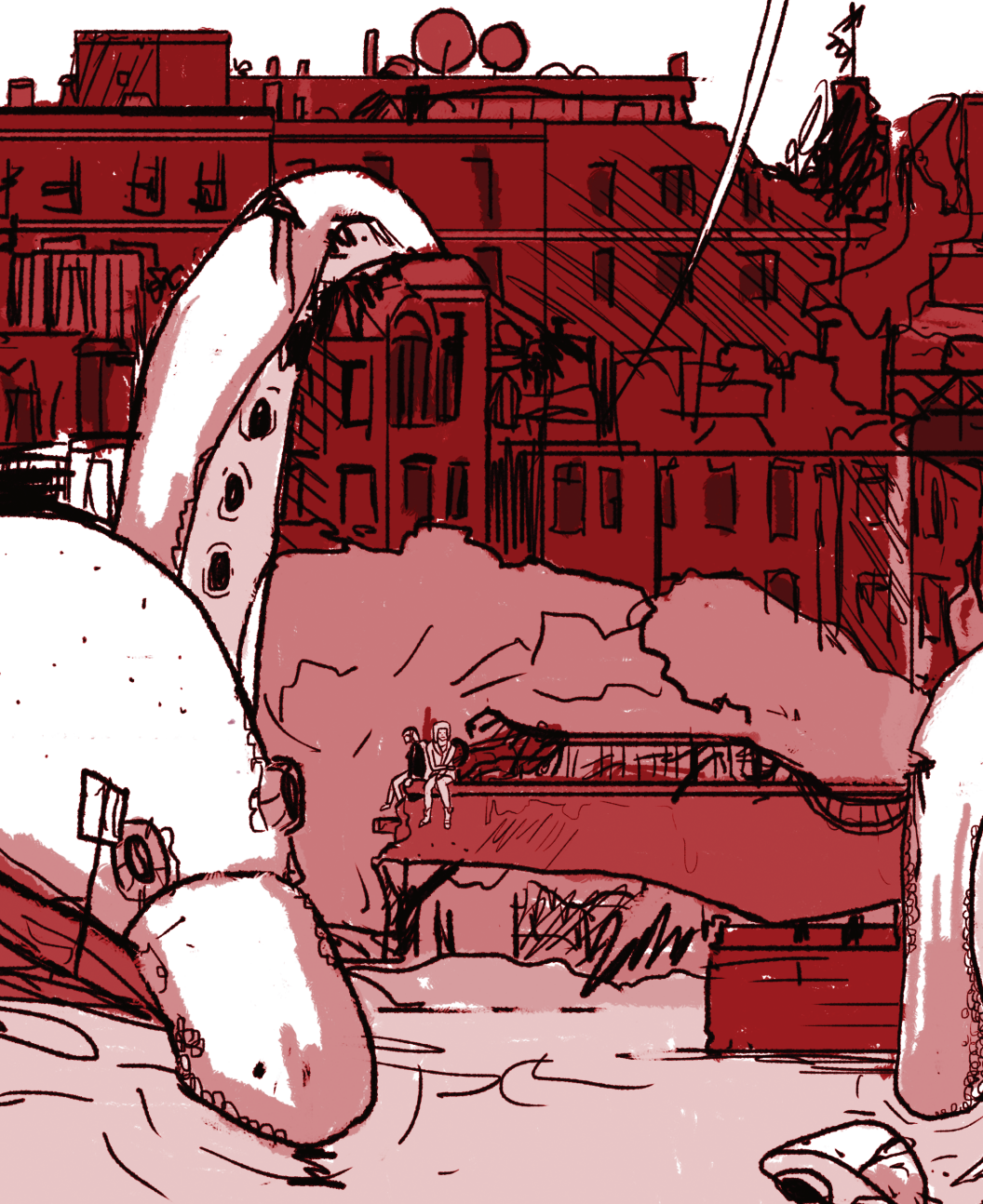




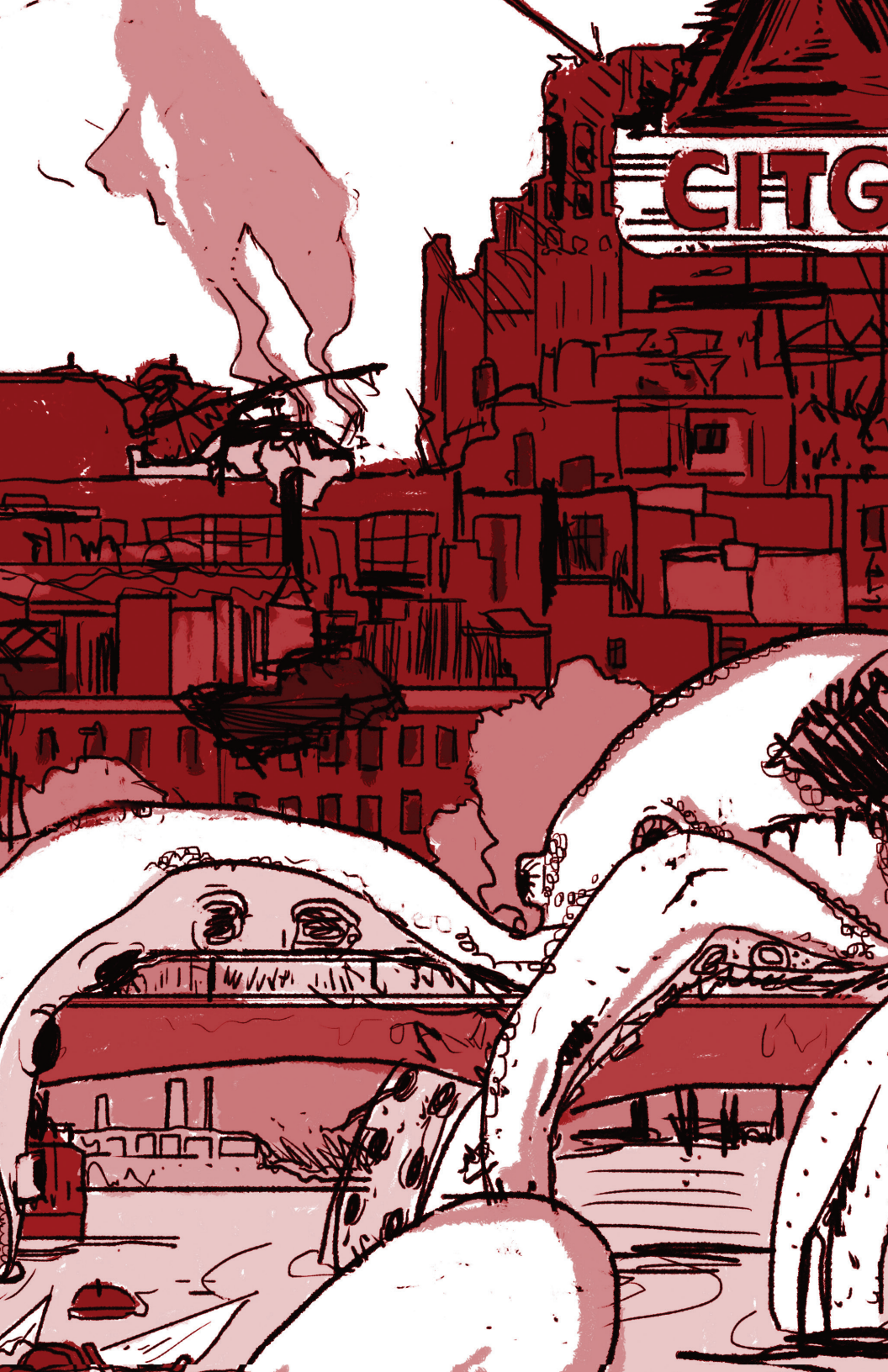
Nah, it was too far  
outta the way...

allison burke + tara harris

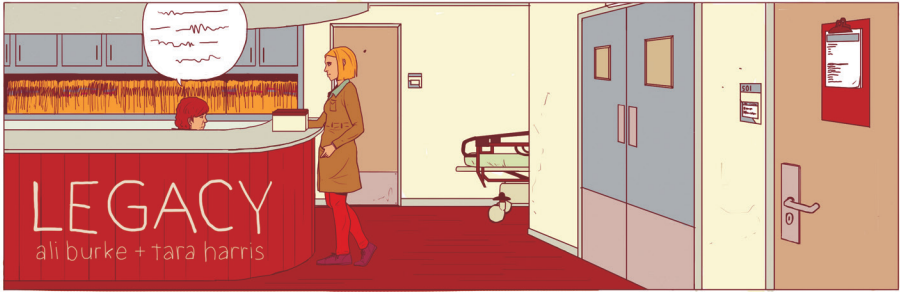
They had the most  
amazing eggs benedict







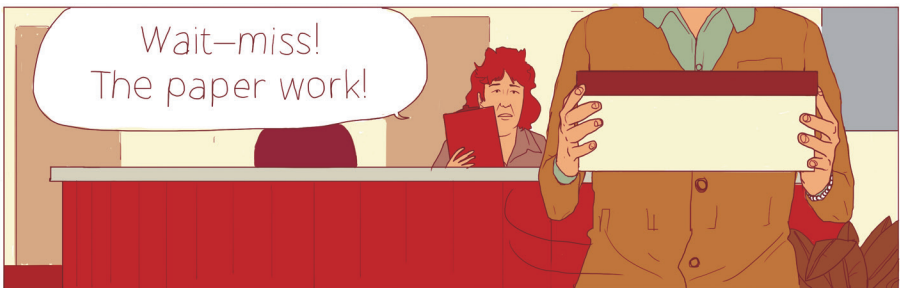
## FICTION



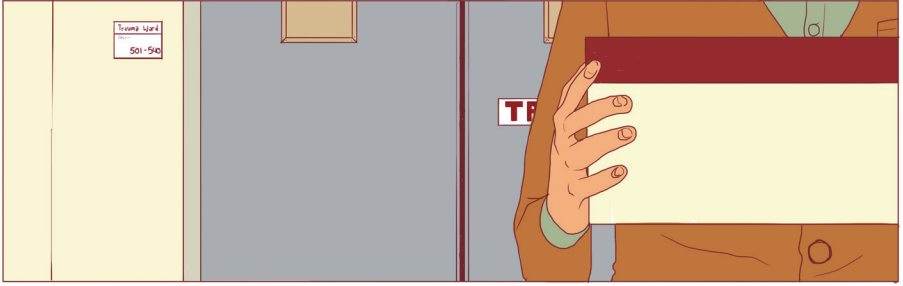
Was it  
suicide?



Wait—miss!  
The paper work!



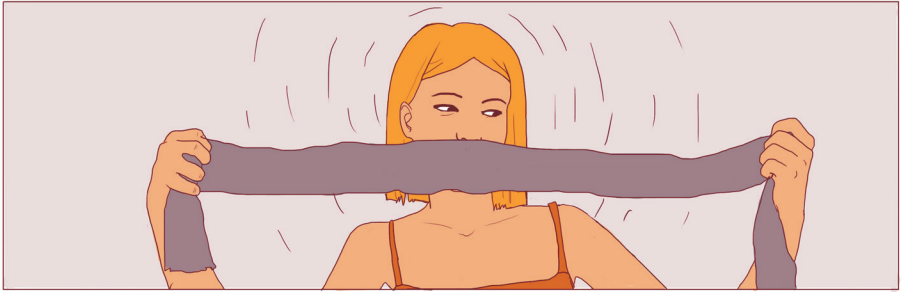
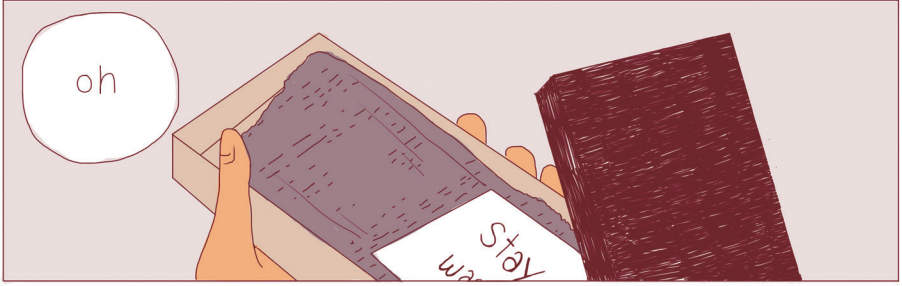
## FICTION



allison burke + tara harris



## FICTION



REST HERE

REST HERE

PAINTING

PAI

NTI



PAINTING



NG

sequoya review

## PAINTING

mamie bivin

### **Submerged 1**

mamie bivin

oil and charcoal

2013

### **Submerged 2**

mamie bivin

oil and charcoal

2013

## PAINTING



marnie bivin



## PAINTING

hannah hahn

### Chiefin

hannah hahn

### Made in America

hannah hahn

## PAINTING



hannah hahn



# **The Deconstruction of the Rochambeau**

jan burleson

oil and wood on board  
2013



## PAINTING



jan burleson

# Edna Mae

jan burleson

oil on canvas  
2013

PAINTING



PAINTING



jan burleson

# Softness

amanda qualls

ink on paper  
2013

PAINTING

## PAINTING



amanda qualls

DRAWING

DR

sequoya review

WI

DRAWING

A -

NG

## DRAWING

emma azcona

# His Corner

emma azcona





## DRAWING

erin flettrich

# Nonnie

erin flettrich



## DRAWING



erin flettrich

# Smyrna, Tennessee

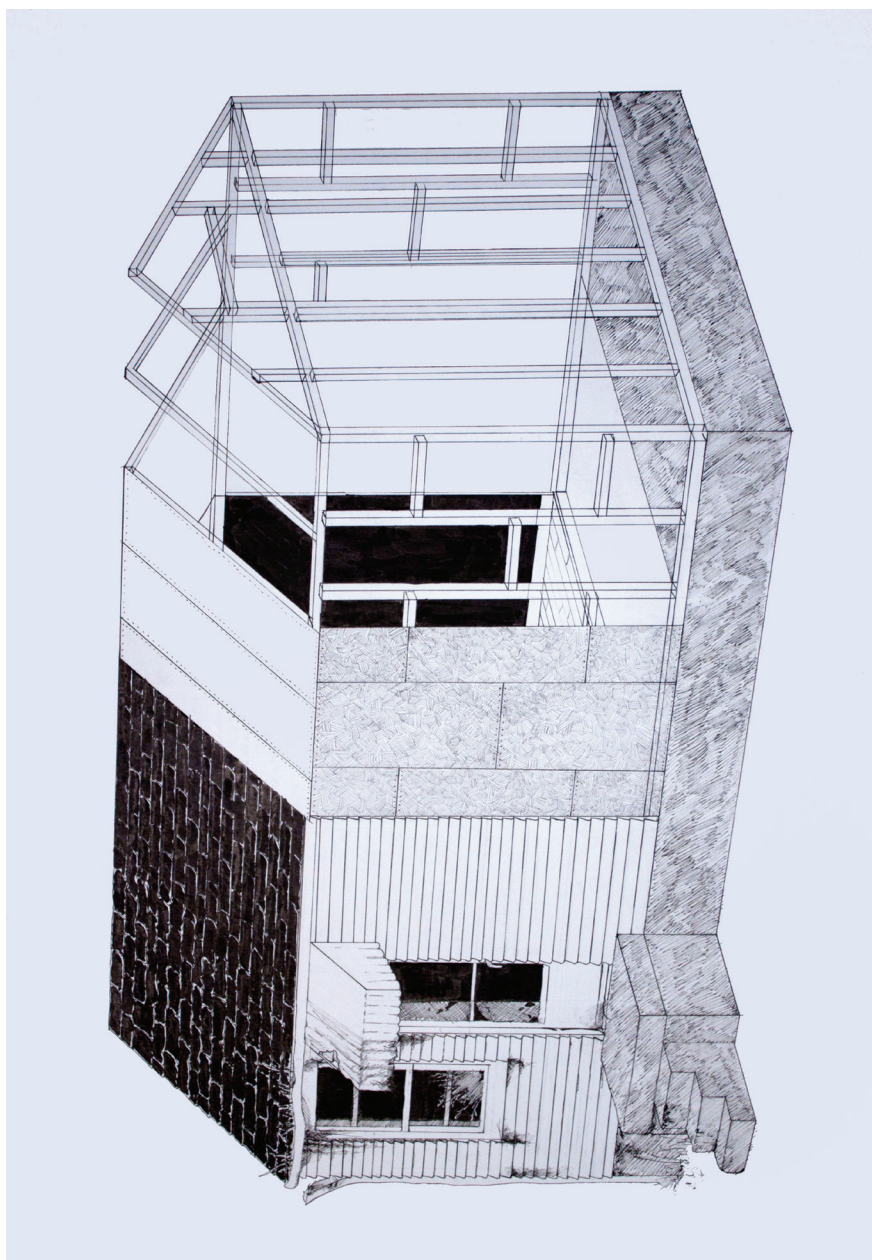
amanda qualls

mixed media

2014

DRAWING

## DRAWING



amanda qualls

PHOTOGRAPHY

PHO

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PHOTOGRAPHY



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sequoya review



## PHOTOGRAPHY

rachael poe

**Abandoned**  
rachael poe

2013





rachael poe

## PHOTOGRAPHY

hannah hahn

### **Disconnected**

hannah hahn

2012



## PHOTOGRAPHY



hannah hahn

# Forgotten

christine jeter

## PHOTOGRAPHY



jenna kalmon

# A Moment in Life Where Super Heroes Exist

jenna kalmon

2014

PHOTOGRAPHY





jenna kalmon

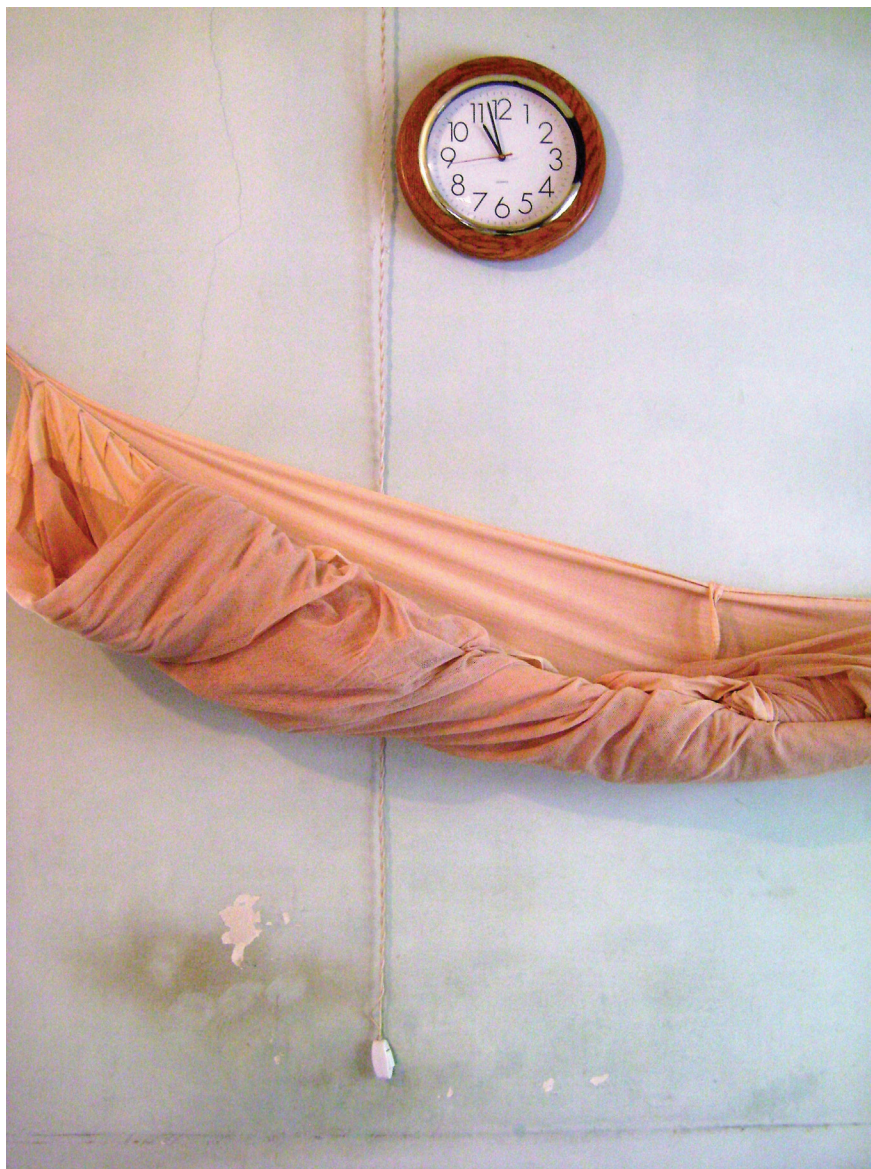
## PHOTOGRAPHY

siri alay

# Almost

siri alay

## PHOTOGRAPHY



siri alay

rosemary dunn

# Crosstown Documentary

rosemary dunn

PHOTOGRAPHY



## PHOTOGRAPHY



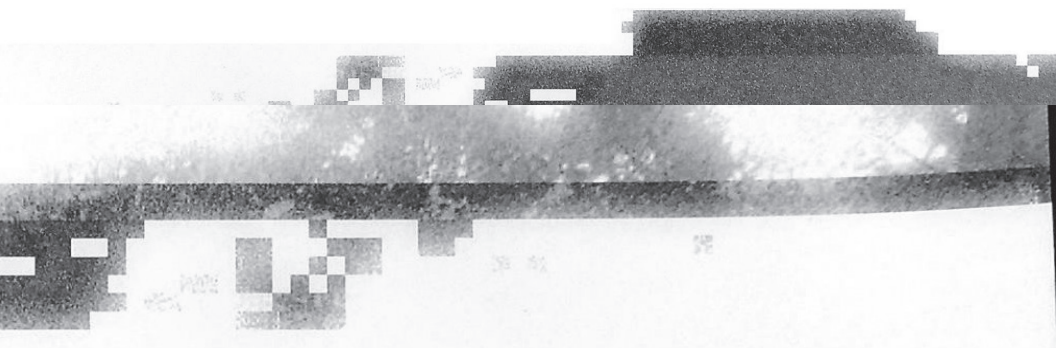
rosemary dunn

GRAPHIC DESIGN

GRA

sequoya review

DES



GRAPHIC DESIGN

**PHIC**

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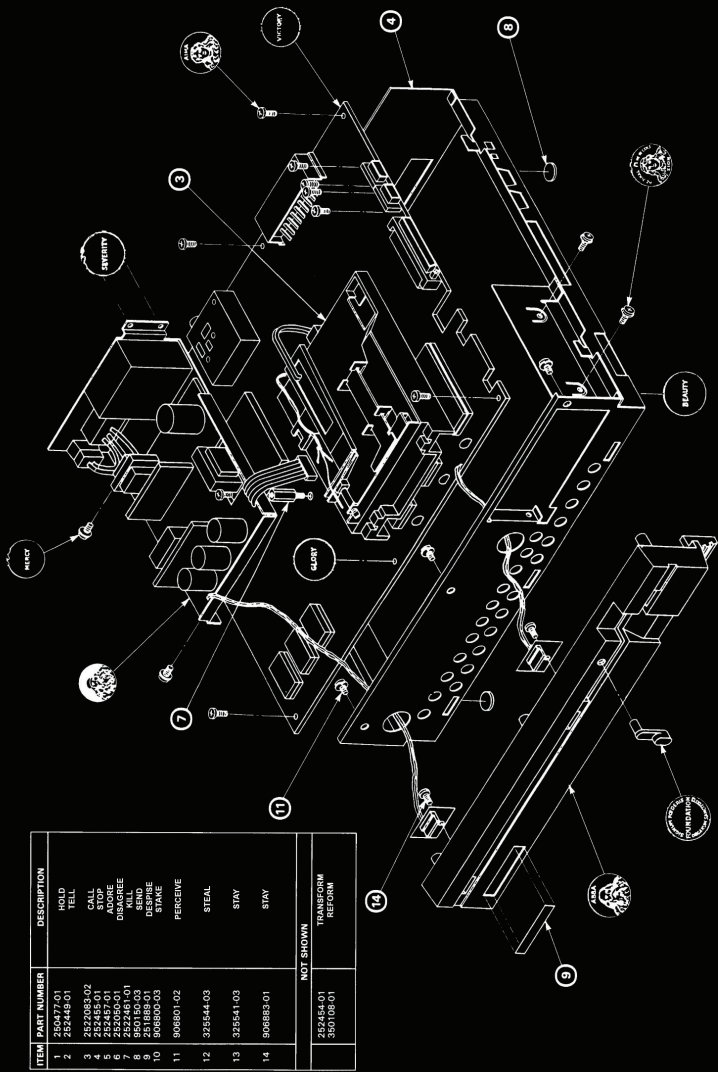
katie seerson

**savior\_machine**

katie seerson

2014

SERVICE PARTS REFERENCE DIAGRAM



katie severson





**“There’s something inside that may  
interest you. Won’t you come in?”**

steven eddy

2014



## GRAPHIC DESIGN



steven eddy

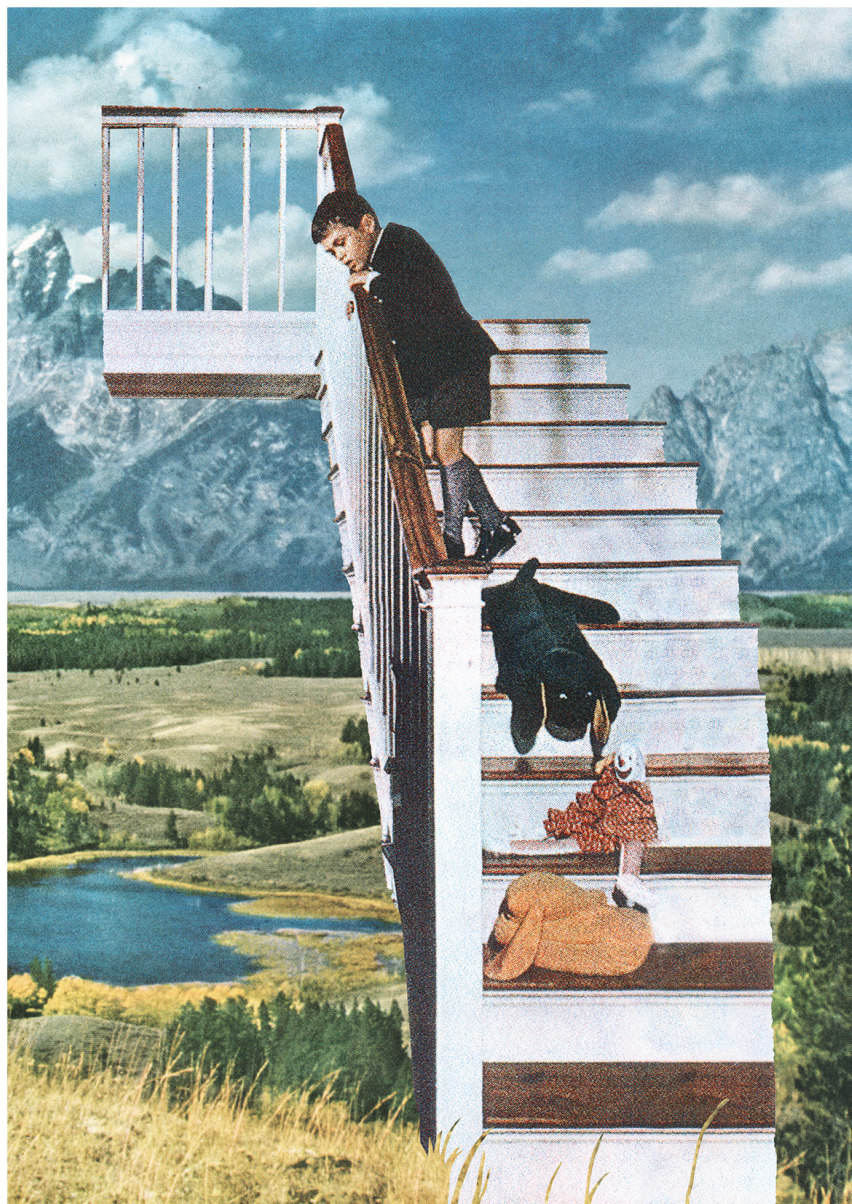
# **“This house wants to be lived in.”**

steven eddy

2014



## GRAPHIC DESIGN



steven eddy

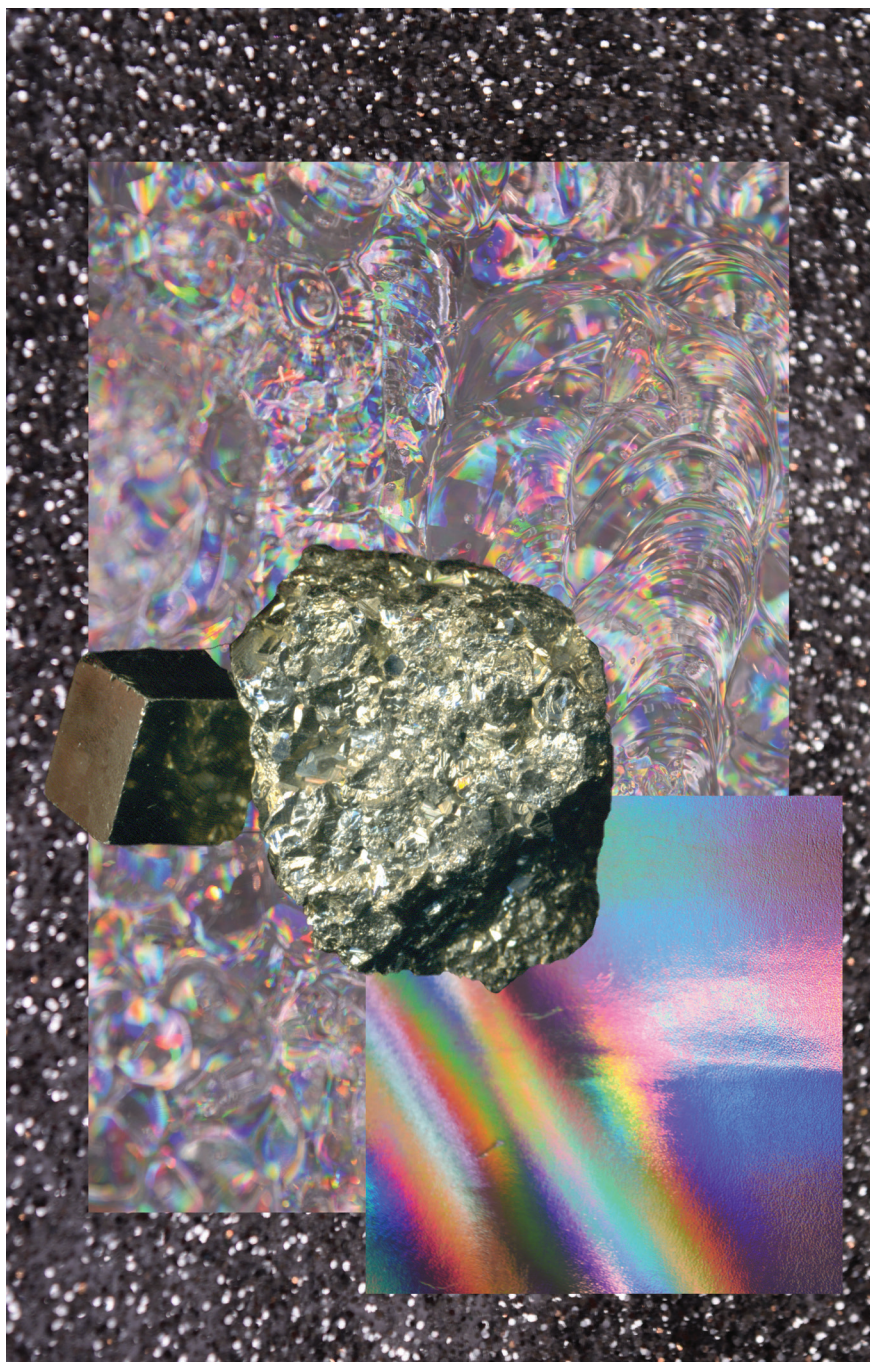
julie heavner

# Evolutionary

julie heavner

2014





ART: END HERE

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